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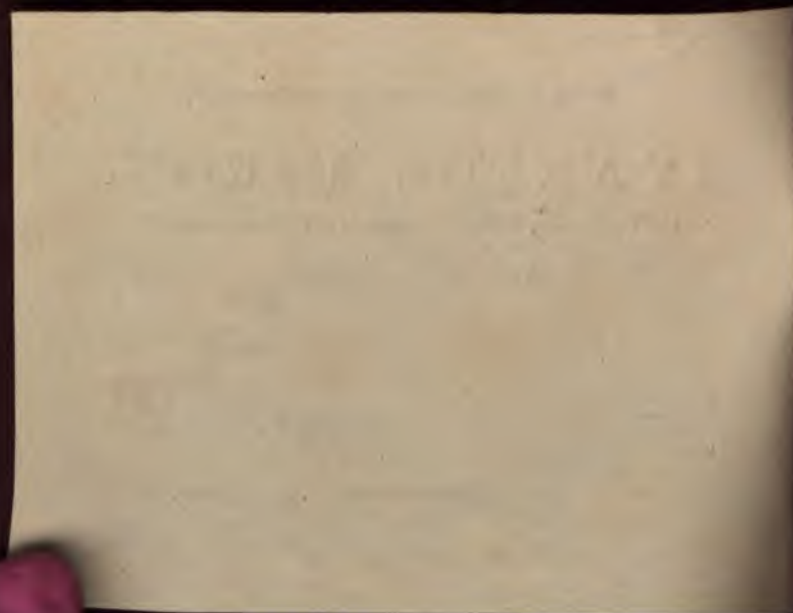
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# THE GOSAU SMITHY

, AND OTHER STORIES.

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VOL. I.





# THE GOSAU SMITHY

And other Stories

BY MRS. PARR

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY FOX," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—I.



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## THE GOSAU SMITHY.

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### I.

AT the foot of the Zwieselalp stands the Gosau smithy, and in much the same place a smithy stood many years ago, when travellers were far less numerous than now. Still people were beginning to arrive during summer, and Franz Friedel's sharp eyes soon saw there was more money to be made by them than at his forge; so he added on a bit here and a bit there to his house, until he could give four or five people a very comfortable night's lodging, and then (having of late got a trifle too heavy for climbing) he hired two or three trustworthy men to go at his price with the

visitors to the different excursions. Altogether he contrived to make a good thing of it, and to regard the summer as a promising harvest-time with which no one else had a right to interfere. A hard, prosperous man was Franz Friedel, brooking no contradiction, and with but one distinct object in life—to hoard up money, and to be reckoned the richest man in Gosau. Any one who dared to thwart him in this he at once regarded as his enemy; and of late he had been much troubled by the enterprise of one Hans Cranach, who lived at the Gosau mill, and who had actually put up a notice that *he* supplied travellers with guides and conveyances.

It was this circumstance which just now bothered Franz. Hitherto he had always been able to trust to Herman Brau and Josef Stöger, two men whose equals in those parts could not be found; but since the

night when they were overtaken by a snow-storm, and Herman had died of exposure to cold, Josef, poor fellow, had never been himself, and was fitted for nothing better than looking after cattle or storing fodder. On this evening, Franz, who sat resting himself on the settle, while his wife busied herself in getting the supper, was much troubled about how he should manage for the best.

“More travellers come each season,” thought he; “and if they once find they cannot get what they want here, they’ll stop at the mill, and all my custom will come to an end.”

At this point his reverie was interrupted by a puff of cold air, which came whistling in from the door his wife Barbara had just opened in order that she might call their son to join them at supper.

“I doubt,” she said, coming back shivering, “if thou’rt wise in storing the sledges



so early, Franz; the wind bites yet with icy teeth."

"There'll be no more ice this side of All Saints, Barbara, not but 'twould please me better if this turn hadn't come, for 'tis time that Josef and the cattle were up above. Well, Max," he exclaimed, turning to a sturdy young fellow who entered, "this doesn't look promising for the 10th of May, does it?"

"No, father, but old Hans says it's a good sign, and means a good summer. He says, in the best corn and fruit year he ever remembers, they had snow all through May."

"A hot summer always brings travellers," said Franz, going back to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Well, all the better for us."

"Yes, all the better, if my way was clear, but I haven't got any one that I can fairly

trust to. That fellow at the mill has been talking them all over ; I can see that plain enough. Fools, not to believe that our only chance of standing against him is to hold together, and make this the best starting-place ! Didn't I tell you that the money he spends never came out of his own pocket ? And I was right, too ; for Theodor Löhr, from Golling, was telling me that one of the Ischl landlords, a Berliner, wants to get the whole place round under his thumb, and whatever Cranach starts the other one stands the risk of. I wonder now how long he'd have sat thinking before he'd hit upon setting up a place on the Alp, but the instant I begin, before I have time to get mine well up, his is finished, and on the very place that that ninny Welser persuaded me against. He's bought over more than half the men in the village, that's very plain, and what to do I don't know."

“Oh, never fear, father ! we’ll manage him yet,” said Max cheerily. “I know many who’ll stand by you ; Johann Sitzler and Heinrich Segmüller have both promised to do all they can, and—well, I shall always be here at hand, and Fritz.”

“I’m sure there is no reason for you to turn guide, Max,” said the mother, who gave no favour to her more enterprising husband’s schemes. “Far better that you should both stick to your trade.”

“And be worth never a thaler ! No, no, wife ; I mean that Max shall be a rich man when I die.”

“Ah, ’tis better to live happy than die rich,” said the good woman, rising hastily from the little table where they had sat together eating their supper, that she might push the pot of broth over the fire, her quick ears having caught sound of footsteps approaching, doubtless those of Fritz, the

son of Franz's dead brother. She picked up another log and threw it on to the hot cinders, so that by the time Fritz appeared they blazed up brightly, and showed to the assembled party his short, thick jacket all glistening with the hail, through a shower of which he had just come.

Fritz had returned from Halstadt, and was, therefore, a welcome arrival. Franz gave him a hearty greeting for being back so early. Max made room for him nearest to the fire, and Barbara began cutting thin slices of bread into the wooden bowl which they had just emptied; for Fritz's peculiarities were well known, and beyond "Ja, ja," and "Nein, nein," nothing more would they get out of him until he had finished the supper which his long walk had rendered more than usually acceptable.

A deep-drawn sigh at length announced that the bowl was empty, and Fritz not only

ready to answer questions, but willing to be, by degrees, cajoled into imparting the valuable information which he was most certain to have become possessor of. Confident in this expectation, Franz and his son lit their pipes. Fritz prepared for a like enjoyment, while Barbara raked the fire together, blew out the candle, and seated herself down to her knitting.

As was only proper, the first inquiries related to the business which had taken Fritz to Halstadt; but this disposed of, the next question was whom had he seen.

“Oh, no one!” was his answer; and then, having thoroughly enjoyed the disappointment his answer occasioned, Master Fritz suddenly recollected himself, and said, “Yes, to be sure, though, I did see some one, I saw Karl Cranach.” Karl Cranach being the man of all others Franz desired should have been seen, he being the brother of

Hans Cranach, of the Gosau mill—a ne'er-do-well fellow, ready enough at all times to accept a flagon of beer, and over it retail all he knew, whether good or evil, of his prosperous brother's affairs. Their meeting having been fully detailed, for more than an hour Fritz managed to keep his uncle in a continuous fever, alternating between hope and disappointment. At one time he would tell him that Hans was tired of the whole business, and had more than a mind to stick to his trade of miller, and let those be inn-keepers who liked to be pestered to death with strangers and travellers, of whom he had already been sickened. Then, after old Franz had well chuckled over this speedy fulfilment of his hopes, Fritz would retail how the landlord from Ischl, who also owned one of the best hotels at Gastein and at Gmunden, had sent to Hans begging him not to give in, as if the scheme failed he

would bear the loss ; and if it succeeded, as he felt sure it would, Hans Cranach should be master of a finer inn than any standing in Halstadt. Then up would flame Franz, vowing and declaring that he would spend his last kreutzer in keeping what he looked upon as his right—the right of accommodating travellers and providing them with guides, horses, and carriages. Until a couple of years back his privilege had never been disputed or encroached upon ; the master of the Keferwirth, the only public drinking place in the village of Gosau, being content to limit his ambition to providing good beer for his neighbours' drinking ; no wish had he to enter upon any rivalry with Franz Friedel, whose head everybody knew was as full of schemes as his purse was of florins. But in an unlucky moment the owner of the Gosau mill died, and the mill came into the possession of his wife's nephew, Hans

Cranach, who, from having been head-waiter at the "Post" at Ischl, was of a speculative turn, and thought it no bad thing that those who were travelling should, when they landed from Halstadt, make the Gosau mill their starting-point and head-quarters. So he pulled down the old house in which his uncle had lived and died, and built in its stead a pretty looking inn, which was the admiration of every one except Franz Friedel.

Hans had a great taste for building, and it turned poor Franz by turns green and yellow to see that the little chalet which Hans had erected on the Zwieselalp looked ever so much better than the one which he had put up. Not that Franz saw the good of spending money unnecessarily. He laughed loudly at Hans, calling him a fool who built as fine a house for his beasts as he had for himself.



Fritz having apparently exhausted his store of news, Barbara rose to get ready for the night, while Max went out to see that the cattle were all right, and then returned to the kitchen, saying that the night was clearer, and there was some little promise of a finer morrow.

"That is well," exclaimed Franz; "then Josef must start early, and you, Fritz, must go up with him."

"Cranach's up there already," said Fritz. "I forgot to tell you *that*. He bought up Anton Kreugberger's lot, and they drove the beasts up from Annaberg the day before yesterday."

"Kreugberger's beasts!" cried Franz; "why they weren't worth the journey to look at; if that's all Hans Cranach's built his grand chalet for, he's a greater fool than even *I* took him for."

Fritz shook his head.

“Karl says the cattle are only a blind. He knows for certain that the landlord at Ischl is going to tell all his visitors that the best view in the Salskammergut is from the Zwieselalp, and to see the sun rise there is worth a journey from Vienna any day; and then he'll recommend them to sleep up there at Cranach's chalet; and Cranach'll get as much for a straw bed there as they'd pay for a grand chamber at Ischl or Gmunden.”

“Then, by St. Florianus, he shan't be the only one who has beds to let,” roared out Franz. “So that's why the rascal chose that place; he wanted to be the first to catch people as they go up; but I'll be even with him. Max, no matter for weather, thou must go off first thing to Heinrich, and get him to come; we'll add another couple of rooms on before Master Cranach knows how the wind's blowing. Soho! 'tis true I

haven't spent my days in studying how I might cheat honest folk, but Hans Cranach will find he's got his match in Franz Friedel."

## II.

NEXT morning Max was up betimes, and off to Heinrich Segmüller's cottage; but the carpenter was not there, and his sister said it was of no use waiting for him, as he would not be away from the pastor's house for fully a week to come. On went Max to Conrad Koenig's, but he was not able to give him any assistance, being at work on a job which he had given his word he would finish without delay. So, trying to put a good face on the matter, Max returned to his father, and after telling him the result of his inquiries, he urged him to let him set off and stay upon the Alp for a few days with Josef, who was a carpenter by

trade, and, between Max working and Josef directing, they'd at least put the thing in proper training, and by the time they were ready for more, Heinrich or Conrad would be able to help them and put the finishing touch to their labours. About this work it was not possible for Franz to be of any service, as a week or two before this he had strained his back, so that an hour's climbing would send him straight off to bed. Fretting and fuming over his ill luck, and declaring that everything was going against him, he consented that Max should go up to the chalet, and push forward as much as possible the erection of the two rooms which were to serve as sleeping apartments for future travellers.

"I shall come down this evening," said Max, "as soon as I see what is wanted, and be off with it to-morrow; if Josef has started he won't get to the top before twelve,

and then he's got to see after the beasts ; so any way we could not set fairly to work until to-morrow."

This being perfectly true, Franz assented, and before another hour had passed Max was off, and the ground round the smithy was a scene of unwonted noise and confusion, occasioned by its occupants' endeavours to get the unwilling cows, goats, and pigs to be of the same mind as their drivers, and be persuaded to forsake their native plains for the mountain, whose peak towered up some two thousand feet above.

At length, by dint of Fritz's exertions, Josef's shouts, and Franz's long whip, the bewildered animals set off at a scamper, which soon took them out of sight ; and, exhausted with his efforts, Franz went into the kitchen to smoke his pipe and rest awhile. The day was cold, and the blazing fire made the room look bright and cosy.

Barbara gave a sigh as she thought of her dear boy banished from these comforts by the stupid notion of rivalry his father entertained against Hans Cranach. She much preferred being the Gosau smith's wife, mistress of her own house, to being landlady of the finest inn in Germany, with people coming and going at all hours, leaving you with never a minute to call your own, and wanting fresh sheets and table linen until you didn't know what year's spinning you were using, and everything was in disorder and confusion. Barbara was very proud of her house linen; she would often tell Max that it would not matter much to him that the maidens no longer were such spinners as they had been in her day, for she had enough and to spare for him when he took a wife to himself. If Franz heard this said, he would frown his disapproval of such idle talk, and say—

“Wife, indeed! Pooh, pooh! Nonsense!”

“And why nonsense, Franz?” Barbara would ask. “The lad is twenty come August, and a place in my heart stands vacant for the daughter who is to be a comfort to our old age.”

Barbara had fixed her motherly eyes on two or three comely village maidens in Gosau, as being by their industry and modesty suitable candidates for this honour. That it was necessary that they should possess fortunes never entered her mind. Max would inherit the smithy, and that was enough to supply all the wants he could possibly have.

“I don’t like the thought of Max sleeping upon the Alp in this weather,” she said, as her thoughts followed her son; “no bed, and no better shelter than the beasts have.”

“He’ll be as well off as Josef,” grumbled out Franz.

“Poor Josef! Yes; but had it not been for this Cranach, you would not have had Josef up there until the weather altered. I doubt but snow will fall yet.”

“Well, let it fall,” returned Franz snappishly. “What’s your boy made of if he cannot bear a few snow-flakes on him. You’d make a ninny of Max if you could, only he’s too like his father to be under the thumb of any woman.”

Feeling she was no match for her husband, Barbara said no more, but contented herself by sacrificing to her motherly love a worthy member of her poultry yard; and, this consigned to the broth-pot, she began to prepare the batter for some pancakes, determined that at least Max should have a good supper for being obliged to gratify his father’s whims.



It was dusk when Max sprang over the little fence and lighted close to where Barbara stood, and had stood at intervals for an hour and more, looking for her son's approach.

"Mother!"

"Yes, Max. I just ran out to see if thou wert near; I thought 'twould be about the time. Thou'rt cold?"

"No, I have almost run down. 'Tis sharp above though. I'll warrant the women feel it so."

"Women!"

"Yes, Cranach has sent up an old fellow from Hütttau, and his wife and a young maiden with him."

"Poor bodies!" exclaimed Barbara. "I fear then what your father says is true, and that this Cranach is a hard man, or he'd know better than to expose his fellow-creatures to the cold on such nights as we have had of late."

From his father Max received a second welcome. Franz was all eagerness to be told what was wanted, and what news Max could give of the party in possession.

“Well,” said Max, “I’ve only seen the women, and a boy who told Josef that the man has already a return of pains in his limbs, which had laid him up during the winter, and from which he had scarce recovered.”

“Women !” exclaimed Franz. “I don’t see that they’re of much use up there,” he added, after a reflective pause.

“We shan’t want any,” said Max decisively; “but then few are as handy at setting things straight as old Josef; he’s going to have his little nephew up with him, and later on you must look for a lad—that is if anything comes of this scheme.”

“A plague on Cranach if not, for putting us to all this cost ! I wish that you or Josef

could find out a little more without Cranach being any the wiser."

Max shook his head. "I wasn't going to take any notice of them," he said.

"Couldn't you pick up an acquaintance with the women? They'd be sure to let it all out; I never saw one yet who could keep gossip to herself. What like are they?"

"One is old and one is young, that is all I know."

"A mother and daughter," put in Barbara, setting her savoury mess on the table. "Ah, well, my worst wish for them is that they were set before as good a supper as this one."

"I'll echo that," snarled Franz, "for then there'd be a chance of Cranach being soon sent to beggary, as I shall be by such extravagance as this."

"Never mind," laughed Max, "enjoy it

now father ; it smells good enough to reach the châlet and set all their mouths watering."

"Don't let Josef stand out too late," said Franz, laying down his spoon for an instant; "he mustn't get himself laid up like that fellow of Cranach's."

"Oh ! Josef is right enough ; this man hadn't got over his attack, but the boy said he wouldn't tell Cranach so, as he'd been out of work for a long time. You must give me some cheese and bread to take up with me to-morrow, mother, and mind," he added in a whisper, "to give me another such supper when I come down."

Barbara nodded her head, and after the pipes were lighted and Fritz's supper put on one side, she went to her store cupboard to see what she could get for Max, and so liberal was she towards her son's anticipated wants, that the next morning Max de-

murred, saying it was twice as much as he needed.

“Then there’ll be all the more left for Josef. And Max,” she said, producing a little pot, “give this to the wife there, and tell her to rub it into her man’s back, ’twill do him a sight of good. Forget not to be pitiful my son,” she added, seeing him hesitate; “and in sickness God shall make thy bed.”

Max said no more, but put the ointment into his pocket. He was a good-hearted lad, and used to declare that no maiden living could ever be as dear to him as his old mother. It had been arranged that Franz should send up the principal things later in the day; notwithstanding which Max burdened his back with a goodly load, under which he set off at a pace which showed he neither lacked health nor strength. The day was brighter, the wind blew less keen, and through the patches of snow which still

lingered here and there tiny green leaves were struggling. Max let his eyes fall lovingly upon each sign which revived the hope of coming spring and summer days—days when the young forget past troubles, and think only of the meetings at church and the strolls in those long evenings when the light seems never to fade away. Something put the thought of a sweetheart into Max's mind, and he stopped whistling to wonder if it would ever come to pass that he should have a wife; and if so, who would she be. Many an inviting glance had been cast towards Max from the village maidens, but none of them had ever affected him very seriously. He had tried to get Fritz's opinion as to which girl he admired most, but Fritz would give him no help on the matter. Suddenly a spring he gave to get upon the wide ledge of thick grass made the pot in his pocket bump against his side,

reminding him of the promise he had given to his mother. It had seemed much easier to fulfil that promise then than now. Max was not so violent in his feelings of resentment against Cranach and his belongings as his father was; still he had no love for such a fellow nor for those in his employ, and he intended to throw every obstacle he could in the way of the rival châlet. Looking up at this moment he encountered a pair of eyes fixed upon him, and then he found that he was being scrutinised from over the wooden fence by a young girl who, the moment she saw that she was caught, burst into a laugh, which sounded so merry and gleeful that Max caught the contagion, and burst out laughing too.

“I forgot that you could see me,” she said. “I have been watching you ever since you crossed the stones. You are Max Friedel?”

Max nodded assent.

"I am called Mahley," she continued.

"Your father is ill?" said Max, thinking this a famous time for the introduction of the ointment.

"You mean Johann; he is not my father. Yes, Marian, his wife, thinks he caught a chill when it blew so cold up here the first night."

"My mother has sent up some ointment," said Max, "which cured my father, and she says is sure to cure him." And he jerked his head sideways as he produced the pot from his pocket.

"Thy mother!" exclaimed the girl in a tone of surprise, which made Max laugh.

"Yes, I told her about him," he explained. "Josef, the old man up here, told me, and your boy told him."

"She is a good woman, thy mother, then," said Mahley gravely.



"She is the kindest soul in the world," answered Max proudly; and his answer brought a grave smile into Mahley's face, which gave her quite a different look.

"You must come in," she said, "and see Johann, and give Marian the salve; it will be sure to cure him."

This, however, Max declined to do; he said he was busy and pressed for time, and Josef he knew was waiting for him.

"I will not ask thee to stay long," said Mahley persuasively, "but poor Johann is so cast down 'twould cheer him greatly to hear of thy father being cured."

So, unable to resist her pleading face, Max consented, and a few minutes after he was chatting away to the sick man, who sat propped up in a seat which the two women had striven to make as easy as they could.

Much interest was expressed in Franz,

whose case Johann felt had been a precisely similar one to his own; and as the ointment had cured Franz, it stood to reason it would cure him.

As Max, after leaving him, walked across to his own ch  let, nearly half a mile distant, he could not help smiling at the different aspect which affairs had assumed. These people, whom he had come up to watch and be a spy upon, were all at once turned into friends, anxious to be first in performing some neighbourly act of kindness. They had begged Max to come again in the evening and partake of their supper; and when he declined on the score of being so busy, Mahley volunteered that Marian should cook for them.

### III.

It was the 22nd of May when Max went up the Zwieselalp and made the acquaint-

ance of Mahley—an acquaintanceship which, in the space of two months, had ripened into a very decided attachment. From the unusual heat, the season had been the busiest ever known in the Salskammergut, and the hotels from Gmunden to Salzburg were all crowded. The chalets on the Alp had proved a most fortunate speculation, and every night the one belonging to Hans Cranach, as well as that of Franz Friedel, was crowded with people well inclined to pay more for a bed of straw up there than for a comfortable room below.

There was no more cause for rivalry when there was trade enough for all, notwithstanding which old Franz looked with envy on every customer Hans had; and he would have liked to strangle each guide who presumed to conduct a party from the Gosau mill. Much of this feeling was kept alive by his nephew Fritz, who of late had found

it necessary to go up very often himself, in order, so he said, to see that Cranach's people didn't get it all their own way.

"Max is much too easy with them," he would add. "If I can't get travellers into our place I try and persuade them to go on."

"Shame to thee then," Barbara would say; "live and let live, Fritz."

"The Cranachs never mind how they speak of us, Aunt Barbara; why, only yesterday Johann told Karl that he heard Moritz——"

"Oh! keep thy idle gossip to thyself, and if thou can't be christian-like, forget that there lives such a man as Hans Cranach."

Of late, however, little time has poor Barbara had for aught save standing over the hot fire. From morning until evening, somebody is calling for fish, flesh, or fowl. She has two maidens to help her, if help it can be called, for, as she sighs, with such a

heap of men from all the neighbouring villages idling and waiting about, how is it possible to keep girls at their work. And if one had a dozen pair of eyes, could they see all the thriftless ways they are for ever indulging in—wiping the plates in the best napkins, and staining with wine the finest tablecloths.

Poor Barbara ! she is almost beside herself with all this bustle and worry ; she never finds a moment to speak to Franz nor to see Max, and her life, instead of being, as hitherto, peaceful and happy, is a complete burden to her.

Very different is it with Franz, who is up to his eyes in business providing horses and guides for the various excursions, or carriages for such travellers as intend going on to Salzburg or Ischl. He calculates that, if things go on in this way, he shall be able, before the next season comes round, to build

a decent-sized inn in place of the present smithy ; and then, as Fritz suggests, they may snap their fingers at Hans Cranach. If Franz had more time to consider, it might strike him as strange that Max should always be ready and at hand to go with any one up the Zwieselalp, although, by some strange fatality, he is never to be found when wanted for any of the other excursions. But Franz has no time to reflect, and he hardly misses Max. Fritz is so handy—"a lad in a thousand," the old man thinks, "and a rarer hand at a bargain than I am myself." And as he laughs, chuckling over his recollections of Fritz's sharpness, he wishes in his heart that Max was more like his cousin ; "but that comes of giving your child a fool for a mother," he says, apropos of simple, worthy Barbara. "Ah, when Max marries, I'll take care that his wife has plenty of sense in her head, as well as money in her purse,"

These reflections occupy his thoughts as he walks along outside to the place where the knot of men, who are waiting to act as guides and drivers, stand about. Some people have just commenced the ascent, and looking at them, Franz calls out hastily—

“Max, there is no need for thee to go this time; let Bernhard or Wilhelm have a turn.”

“No, no. Now I’m started, father, I’ll go on. Most like I’ll be down again this evening. I shall look for somebody else to go over to Annaberg;” and, with a nod of the head, without waiting for further parley, he ran on to overtake the party whose bags and wraps he was carrying.

Franz’s eyes, full of pride, followed his son’s retreating figure.

“That’s the way to go,” he said, turning to a couple of young fellows near. “There’s

no more lead in the lad's heels than there was in mine when I was his age."

"He does not come down as nimbly as he goes up," said one of the men with a covert sneer.

"'Twont be long before he'll want to stop up there altogether," muttered the other.

"Ah, some of Hans Cranach's birds," thought Franz. "After all it is as Fritz says, we are not a bit too careful. I expect if we did not keep a constant eye on those brutes above, the lies they'd tell us of would be past counting. I'll be even with him though."

While Franz Friedel pondered over the various blows which he contemplated aiming at his rival, his son Max was gaining golden opinions from the travellers he was conducting up the mountain-side.

The guides in these mountainous districts



being proverbially dull and silent, it was a rarity as well as a pleasure to go in company with one so ready and willing to give information as Max. He could tell all about the flowers, and the exact height when you might expect to find each he named. He gave the history of every torrent and landslip they came to, and by the way he told his narrative set forth a picture of the time when this smiling region of sunlight was hugged in the snowy mantle of the dread ice-king.

At last the chalets came in sight, Hans Cranach's coming first. Here Max paused, and asked would it not be better that he went and secured beds, while the rest ascended to the top by the easy path now impossible to mistake.

This being assented to as a very thoughtful arrangement, away went Max, his sober pace changing into a run, the speed of which

considerably quickened as he caught sight of a figure moving about within the little fence, and busily employed in seeing that the various wooden pails and bowls were clean and dry enough to take indoors. Max gave a whistle, which made Mahley (for it was she) first turn, and then run across to the opening at which Max was already standing.

Mahley's greeting is but a shy-spoken "Max, is it thou?" To which Max answers with a nod of his head.

A looker-on would have no hesitation in setting the two down as lovers, and lovers they are, in that delightful stage when, nothing being settled, nobody is supposed to see or be aware of the secret. All their conversation is carried on in whispers, and all their meetings are half-stolen ones. Of course, each has a confidant. Marian lends her aid to Mahley, while Fritz counsels

Max, more especially as to how he shall act with regard to his father.

“If you go speaking a word to him just yet awhile, Max, you’ll be sorry for it,” Fritz says, “and I’ll have nothing more to do with it; but if you like to leave it to me I’ll undertake to bring matters round.”

So, with a thorough belief in Fritz’s better judgment, Max consents not to mention Mahley’s name at the smithy—a resolution not so difficult to keep, now that they seldom or never have the kitchen to themselves. Barbara offered no opposition to her son’s evident disposition to be away from what she no longer considered to be like a home. As for herself, she declares she would sooner live in an ‘alm’ on the Schafberg than go through another such summer. Of course, not one of the young fellows who act as guides but could have told Franz that no matter at which châlet his travellers

sleep, his son spends most of his time at Hans Cranach's; but though Max has several rivals who cannot give him a civil word to his face, they scorn to betray him behind his back, and his secret remains safe. Not a few laugh, however, as they think what a rod is in pickle for old Franz, who is more feared than loved in his native village.

On this evening, to Max's delight, their beds are all engaged; so really are those at Hans Cranach's, only Mahley offers to give up her own little room, and thus secure the pleasure of Max's company at supper; and through the evening she will have him at hand to assist her in all the varied duties which fall to her share—duties undertaken by very few maidens; but what can Mahley do, for, as she says to Max—

“Marian does as much as she can, but Marian understands not the cattle; and,

in spite of Barbara's heal-all, poor Johann is not yet able to do much real work; only if it could be managed that he could keep in this situation, he will be able to lay by for the winter;" and towards the fulfilment of this hope Mahley cheerfully gives her labour and strength.

The party at the chalet number the usual round. The four beds in the cabins, regarded as state apartments, will be occupied; the bundles of hay in the lofts are engaged, and Mahley's own room is allotted to Max's two travellers. These people are accompanied by the guides, who carry their luggage, and take them over to Abtenau or Annaberg.

Sure of a good supper and a pleasant evening, Max and the other lads stand smoking and chatting outside with old Johann until the welcome summons comes, and then inside they rush, taking their

places round the table, each one striving to push in his comrade first, so that by being last he may sit at the end and next to Mahley, who is always outside to help Marian. A rare laugh is raised against Max, who, after much diplomacy, instead of being next to Mahley, finds himself next to Marian—a laugh all on Max's side when, the milk-broth over, the two women get up, and, on sitting down again, Mahley pretends to mistake places, and sits down next to Max. Somehow nobody can be dull or ill-humoured within sight of Mahley's bright face, which the sun has tanned into a yellow brown, nearly akin to her hair, worn plaited and uncovered round her head. Max has already decided that when they are married Mahley shall still wear no headkerchief, and that she shall have a fine stuff dress of bright red, the colour of the cotton one she always has on. The

men all agree that Mahley is not pretty, and not to be named with many of their village belles, and yet her popularity is so great that every one of them is ready and willing to do anything she asks; and in spite of the jealousy of those whose regard has outstripped the bounds of friendship, Mahley has but one enemy, and he is Max's cousin, Fritz. Fritz has been for many a day possessed by a demon of self-opinion, which, when he views his humble situation in life, fills him with ambition and discontent. Those around him, although they look upon him as a queer fellow, feel that he is above themselves in knowledge and sharpness. If he speaks on any subject, he is considered to know more than he says; if he holds his tongue, they believe that if he chose he might tell a great deal more than anybody else. Thoroughly appreciating his abilities, it

sours Fritz to believe that he has no scope for his talents.

“What,” he asks himself, “can a smithy labourer possibly do, but work to put money, which he never gets the handling of, into his master’s pocket. If he were Franz’s son now!—if he had Max’s advantages!—why, he’d be a great man in no time; and brooding over this, he comes to envy Max everything he has, or is likely to have. Whatever the lad possesses, his cousin longs for; whatever Max sets his heart upon, Fritz immediately covets. In the beginning it was this feeling which had given a charm to Mahley, but gradually Fritz found himself possessed by a passion which threatened to entirely master him, and raged all the more violently because he saw that at present it was hopeless. If before he had envied Max, how much greater cause had he to do so now, when brooding over a love which



seemed to half madden him. Hard work was a relief, anything to take his mind off the torture he endured when he knew Max was at the châteaux.

“If I could but get him out of the way,” he kept repeating, “I believe she would soon grow to care for me; for when he isn’t there she always picks me out.”

This was true; for Mahley, innocent of the feeling she had inspired, was most anxious to propitiate Max’s stern cousin, whom everybody spoke of as Franz’s right hand, and the only one who could manage the old tyrant, and turn him from any scheme he’d set his mind upon.

Of late Fritz had been unwearied in his pains to propitiate his uncle; he was up at work early and late; he was full of plans and ideas, all of which when undertaken were sure to prosper, until at length Franz got into the habit of consulting his nephew

on everything, asking his opinion, and in most things taking his advice.

Nor was he the only one who relied upon Fritz. Max, open-hearted, and looking with brotherly love upon the orphan cousin with whom he had been reared, told Fritz all his hopes for the future, and asked him how best his father might be brought round to forget that Mahley bore the hated name of Cranach.

"Your best plan is to keep silent Max," Fritz would say; "if you take my advice you won't be in a hurry to mention Mahley's name, or uncle may go making matters very disagreeable."

"I wish you'd try and bring him round, Fritz; he minds what you say more than anybody else; I'm sure you could manage to make things smooth."

"Well, I don't mind trying, if you'll let me do the work my own way. Is that a bargain?"

"I'll never say a word, so that you'll promise to take the thing in hand. I told Mahley I should speak to you about it, and she's quite certain you'll succeed. She thinks a wonderful deal of you, does Mahley.

Fritz gave a little sneering laugh.

"When the beast is carrying our burden, most of us try to think he is better than he looks. There, there!" he added, seeing Max was going to speak; "don't say another word. If you'll hold your tongue, I'll give you the use of mine directly I find uncle in the right humour."

Fritz's principal object now was, while keeping Franz in ignorance of his son's attachment, to inflame him more than ever against the Cranachs, and then, some day when his violent temper was fairly roused, to tell him the story, hoping that in the heat of his passion he would effectually put a stop

to this love and send Max away. Mahley would be his next care, and if he could but sow the seeds of jealousy, he thought he had a fair chance of ultimate success. He was greatly troubled, fearing that any one else might divulge the secret, and just at this moment he felt none the more easy because Franz had been telling him what those two rascally fellows had said to him.

"I shall tell Max to note both of them, for you may take an oath to it that they're in with Cranach; 'tis almost time that Max was down?"

"Down, down where?" asked Fritz.

"Why, here; he did not mean to stay; he told me that most like he would be back to-night. I wonder that he has stayed contentedly as often as he has done," he added. "It must be dull enough up there when the light fails."

"I find it so," Fritz answered, turning

away, appearing not to hear Franz's next speech of "I can't think what the folks do!" The words seemed to act upon Fritz's memory like a talisman, and straightway before him up rose the pictures his jealous eyes had often witnessed; he knew the very same thing was going on now, and that while he wandered moody and restless below, within the chalet above a merry party was sure to be assembled. The travelers were certain to come dropping one by one into the kitchen, then Mahley, bent upon amusing them, would propose a dance or a song; Johann and she would begin, then the rest would be called upon to join, and, this once commenced, reserve would give way, and they would all be the best of friends and companions, laughing, and joining in the yodels until it was time to go to rest. Then away would run Mahley to see that the beasts were safe, and the

lads would glance round, but Max would have already slipped out, and finding him missing, a laugh or a shrug would intimate that they might as well sit still. Fritz had once stolen out after Max and played the spy upon him, and since then, whenever he conjured up Mahley's face it had the look he saw upon it then, a look it wore for Max alone, and which Fritz's bitter heart felt no other man would ever see turned upon him. And Fritz was right, for, laughing and merry as the girl was with all of them, Max was the first man for whom she had ever felt any love; upon him was centred all her hopes and thoughts; so that, with a constant certainty of seeing Max, this life on the Alp was the happiest time she had ever known, and she sighed whenever she thought it would soon be over, and she, she hardly knew where, for having been early left an orphan, Mahley had been

brought up between her mother's family and her father's relations, the Cranachs; and now it was the rule that Mahley must go to which ever one happened most to want her services. They were all kind and fond of her, still, as she would say, she never felt as if she really belonged to anybody. Now she belonged to Max, who could not bear to be separated from her, and many an hour had the two spent sitting together hand in hand, talking of the happy future when they would be parted never more.

At length the summer passed away, and September set in with such sharp cold nights that an end was put to people sleeping, even in pleasure's name, on the top of the Zwiesel-alp. Johann remained still, and Mahley with them; Josef was also there, but not for much longer, as the day was fixed for the beasts to go down into the valley below. The smithy began to reassume its former

air of quiet and comfort, Barbara once more had the kitchen pretty nearly to herself, and after preparing the supper she now looked forward to her husband, Max, and Fritz partaking of it together. Under these circumstances it began to be very difficult for Max to absent himself without arousing suspicion, and whenever he and Fritz were alone he upbraided him for not having told his father. He saw no good in Fritz's argument, that now it was best deferred until Mahley was out of the way.

"Why, you don't think my father would go to her," he would say.

"Well, I don't know, Max; I have not liked to damp you, but somebody has been talking, and, in spite of all I can say, your father grows more furious against Cranach, and all those who have to do with him."

Max gave an impatient shrug, and Fritz continued hesitatingly—



"I want to know one thing, Max. Is there any inducement by which I could ask you to give Mahley up? I—I am so afraid your father will hold back his consent, and take strong measures with you. Would it not be best, now, to think it over and tell Mahley."

"Tell Mahley what?" burst out Max. "Tell her that my love for her is so feeble that it will not stand a few black looks and hard speeches from my father, who cannot say one word against my choice, except that she happens to be Hans Cra-nach's cousin?"

Fritz sighed.

"Max, it would be folly to blind you if you are going to resist your father, which is more than any woman living is worth. You had best be prepared for extremities, for his anger won't end in words and looks."

“Why, what do you mean?”

“This ; that, though I haven’t spoken directly of you, I put a similar case to him, pretending it was somebody whom I knew at Ramsau. Well, whether he suspected anything I can’t tell, but you never saw such a rage as he put himself into ; and he swore if it were his son (and ’twas his look then that made me almost certain that he knew more than we think for) he’d turn him out to shift as best he could.”

“Let him,” exclaimed Max passionately ;  
“such a threat would have no effect on me.”

“But, Max, what would you do ? Say that you’d got to get your own living for a few months (for, of course, he’d have to come round when he found you determined), where would you go ? At this time of year there is little work in the country.”

“Then I’d go to a town.”

“No, Max, town ways would never suit

you; everything is different there. Albrecht Golds, from Salsburg, came last week, and his talk was quite enough. Wages may be high and places plentiful, but the life wouldn't suit either of us; besides, it wouldn't be worth the journey, for directly uncle heard you were gone that distance away, we should be all sent packing off to beg you to come back. That's the way with such men as he, they'll do anything rather than give in; then, when they see you've got a touch of the same spirit (and who but a fool hasn't it?) it's fall on their knees and beg you to take fifty times more than you asked for."

"I had not a notion that my father felt in this way," said Max. "I don't think you've managed him well, Fritz."

"I've managed him very well if you'll only keep quiet a little longer. What's the good of telling him when, whatever he says,

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you are obliged to hold your tongue? For until you get a few more thalers saved you can't marry anyway."

Max was silent. There was some truth in this, but how was he to get more? During the summer he had contrived to put by a little, but not enough to speak of marrying upon.

"I don't see if the worst comes why I shouldn't get work as well as another man," Max said, after a pause.

"You'd get no work here," Fritz answered. "If 'twas known that you were going against Uncle Franz nobody'd give you work here; they wouldn't offend him."

"Gosau isn't the only place," said Max sulkily.

"No, you're right there; but you mustn't be in a hurry. What do you say to going to St. Wolfgang and having a look about you there for a day or so? Uncle Matthias

asked you to come; and while you were gone I'd see if I couldn't lead up to telling uncle."

Max thought this no bad plan, and accordingly that evening he proposed to his father that he should take a holiday. Franz willingly assented, and Barbara was delighted. She was sure the dear boy needed it after running his legs off, dancing about with a parcel of silly folk who couldn't be in their right minds, or they'd never go sleeping on a heap of straw when below they could take their rest in good feather beds.

"Josef comes down to-morrow, so I'll go up and help him down with the beasts," Max said; "and the next day I'll start."

"Fritz is going to help Josef," said Franz.

"Oh! I can find plenty to do down here, uncle; so if Max doesn't mind I don't."

And the matter was decided, and next

morning Max went up the Alp to spend the last day with Mahley. He was full of hope for the future, and tried his utmost to inspire Mahley with a like amount of gaiety; but, in spite of all, Max could see Mahley's spirits were far from being good, and, even in the midst of her laughter, her eyes would fill with sudden tears. She had been so happy during these past months that leaving the chalet seemed like going from happiness.

"It will be dull work nursing thy sick cousin," Max said, for Mahley had offered to go to Aussee to look after a poor relation who had nobody to claim attention from.

"I shall have thee to think about, Max, and the Dachstein to look upon, and the time will soon pass. You will often think of me, Max?"

"I am thine," he said simply.

"And I thine," she answered, "so that

nothing can part us." And believing this, they said "Farewell!"

#### IV.

THE following morning, unable to restrain his curiosity, Franz Friedel, from behind the hedge, watched the exodus of Cranach's party. He bestowed little more attention on Mahley than he did on Johann and Marian, his principal notice being centred on the oxen and goats, which he saw, with sorrow, were now as fat and well conditioned as his own. Feeling personally injured by the way in which these hitherto proverbially lean beasts had thriven, his temper was not at the best, and, though he kicked the dogs out of his path, terrified a group of loitering children, and soundly rated poor unoffending Barbara, there was still a considerable portion of venom remain-

ing to be worked off. Max had left home that same morning, so that he had no one but Fritz to talk to, and worry over Hans Cranach's good fortune in having people who could turn such beasts as Kreugberger's had formerly been into fine cattle, while he was sure that Josef had neglected his, and Max hadn't paid them proper attention, for they were no better conditioned than when they went up.

"Who was that girl with them?" he asked, every other question being exhausted.

"What girl?" said Fritz.

"Why, with Cranach's people—a staring, impudent-faced wench, who looked as if she could give any one twice as good as they brought."

"She's got her wits about her," said Fritz.

"I'll warrant that, and so has Cranach to take such a one."



"She's Cranach's cousin."

"Ah, I thought she'd got a look of him when she stared round and pointed to the smithy; she didn't know I was looking at her."

"Perhaps she thought to see Max."

"Max!" echoed Franz. "What is Max to her?"

"Nothing, I hope," replied Fritz, who was standing upon a ladder fixing over the house a freshly-painted effigy of St. Florianus. "Does that seem straight to you?" he added, apparently intent on his work.

"Oh, yes! that'll do. You'll be all day up there," Franz exclaimed snappishly; "whenever I want to ask you any questions, you're always sawing or hammering, or half a mile off, so that I've got to roar as loud as if you were half up the Dachstein."

By this time Fritz was down.

"What is it you want to know?" he asked.

"I don't want to know anything."

"Well, just now I don't want to tell you anything; but this evening I should like a bit of a talk between ourselves. Can you manage it?"

Therefore it was that before the morrow came Fritz had told Max's story, and with such good effect that Franz was furious, and went about breathing vengeance against Mahley, Marian, Johann, and Hans Cranach as a set of designing villains, bent upon making a dupe of that fool Max. He had a hundred schemes to propose to Fritz, and although each was more inconsistent than the last, their keynote was the same, "if he could but prevent that Cranach getting the best of him;" for Fritz had so put it that Mahley was viewed in no other

light than a decoy bird, and the whole thing a cunningly devised plan of Cranach's. Of course, the matter could not be kept entirely from Barbara, who maddened her husband by suggesting that if Mahley was a good maiden—which if Max cared for her she felt certain was the case—their marriage might put a happy end to all this unchristian-like jealousy between Cranach and themselves.

"I see you'll have to be careful," Fritz said; "for if Max were at home, and aunt Barbara helping them, they'd contrive to get married in spite of all your opposition."

"He shan't put foot in my home until that fear's past," roared Franz. "Your aunt's a fool, and her precious son takes after her. I can't think what plan to hit upon to prevent it, but if any man would put one into my head it should be a good day's work for him. Why, rather than

give that rascal Cranach such a crow over me as that, I'd give a—— ”

“ Would you give that to me ? ” asked Fritz.

“ Ah, that I would, and freely too, that is if you'd fairly put a stop to the whole business.” Fritz only smiled, and Franz, deceived by his nephew's manner, went on blustering about what he would do, and what he would like to do.

Two days later Fritz said—

“ Uncle Franz, is there to be a bargain between you and me regarding Max, if I can cure him of thinking of this girl of Cranach's ? ”

“ Why, yes,” replied Franz, more soberly. “ But what scheme have you got in your head now ? ”

“ One, I think, will be like to succeed, that is if you won't want to see Max before a month or so is past.”

"I never want to see Max so long as he's got that witch in his head," said the old man angrily.

"Well, then, let me go to St. Wolfgang to-morrow, with a message from you to Uncle Matthias, asking him to offer that Max stays and helps him for the winter. I'll wager Max remains, for he fancies he's treated too much like a boy here. And if so, should he bring home a bride in May, she shan't be a Cranach. But mind, you must be silent and prudent, and should Max return and speak to you, say you chose a wife for yourself, and you suppose he intends to do the same."

Franz asked many questions, but he could not learn what Fritz had no mind to tell. However, having great dependence on his nephew's cunning and diplomacy, he allowed him to set off for St. Wolfgang, where Fritz found Max already very much

in the good graces of his uncle's household.

"Well," said Max, as soon as he and Fritz were alone; "have you been able to speak to father?"

Fritz shook his head. "I attempted it," he answered, "but I soon gave in; he's more dead against the Cranachs than ever, and just now his temper is no better because all the talk is of the capital bargain Cranach made by buying Kreugberger's beasts. He gave next to nothing for them, and they're worth any money now."

"Thanks to Mahley," said Max.

"Poor Mahley didn't escape," continued Fritz. "Uncle was terribly put out because she stared at him and pointed to the smithy. He asked if she wasn't a Cranach, because she had such a look of Hans."

Max gave a perplexed sigh.

"Have you heard anything more of Albrecht Golds?" he asked.

"Why, yes, one of the Hinterers has gone to Salzburg with him."

"Everything seems against me," said Max.

"I don't know that. What should you say to staying here for a time?"

"Here!"

"Yes, Uncle Matthias spoke to me this afternoon. He said he wanted somebody to get things in order here, for they've got beyond him; and if 'twas any one he could trust he'd make it worth his while."

"He meant you," said Max.

"Perhaps he did, but I shan't take it. What do you say to staying?"

"Would father mind, do you think?"

"I can't say; he might, and he might not. But if you're determined to take your

own way in one thing you'll have to do so, I expect, in many others."

"But Uncle Matthias might not care to have me."

"I'll try and manage that," said Fritz; "shall I speak to him to-morrow?"

"Well, you might sound him on the matter," said Max, half reluctantly. "I don't want to vex father, but still——"

"Oh! I don't think he'll be vexed. He knows that, since Aunt Elsa died Uncle Matthias has been too fond of going to the Goldener Hirsch, and you'd be a check upon him; and I know Aunt Barbara will be glad, for she said as much before I left."

"I wonder what Mahley would say to it?"

"I could send her word by Anton; or if I got a chance of going to Halstadt, I wouldn't mind going on to Aussee."

Max was delighted at this last proposal,



and, after a little thought, he determined that, if his uncle was willing to have him, he would stay the winter, and save money enough to marry in the summer.

Could Max have overheard the conversation between Fritz and Uncle Matthias, he would have been surprised, and somewhat bewildered, for the proposition of remaining at St. Wolfgang took the shape of its being the great wish of Max's father and mother, their object being to further the intimacy between Max and his cousin Lotte, Matthias's only child. Matthias was but too pleased to give his consent. Max was just the husband he would have chosen, and he quite approved of cousins marrying, and keeping what property they had in the family.

So after some further talk the matter was settled. Max agreed to stay at St. Wolfgang and Fritz departed, promising him to

tell his father in such a way that he would not be vexed at his decision; and also that he would, by the first opportunity, send the message with which he was entrusted by Max, and as soon as he got a chance he would go to Aussee to see Mahley himself.

Surely, thought he, this sch $\acute{e}$ me must succeed. Lotte's blue eyes and pink cheeks will soon drive Mahley out of Max's mind. Max has no sense—he never had; he does not know what love means, or he could never have sat contentedly by, and watched Mahley laughing and talking with each one who came near her. And then, as to Mahley, all women were jealous, and he must tell her that, besides having the best marriage portion, Lotte was the belle of St. Wolfgang, and that she and Max had been destined for each other from their cradles. Fritz felt quite in spirits. The more he looked at his plan the more certain he felt

that it would end by his gaining Mahley's love for himself. He took good care to send no message, and to his utmost he restrained the desire he felt to go to Aussee and see Mahley. The longer she was kept ignorant about Max's movements the better, as it would give her time to feel angry and hurt at the apparent neglect of a lover, who could let months go by without sending her a word, or making an effort to come a few miles to see her.

## V.

WHEN Fritz returned to Gosau, he half opened to his uncle the plan he had hit upon, and Franz was well pleased that Max should have made no opposition to remaining. It was also pleasing to Barbara that there was some prospect of her son choosing from among his own relations—it

was more comfortable, she said, to think of one's linen and hoardings being handled by your own kin; it added to the pleasure of putting by. Amid all this, however, her kindly heart had time to send a thought to Mahley. 'Twas no wonder that the poor maiden had looked at Max with favour. There were few such comely lads going nowadays, although she hoped Max had not encouraged what he saw he could not return.

"A bold-faced wench," Franz called her; but Barbara stood up for the girl, who lost nothing in her motherly eyes by turning an admiring gaze on her son. Still she was glad that Max preferred Lotte. Lotte was his cousin, and knew Barbara and her ways; and as the good old soul sat knitting by the firelight, she pictured what a happy home 'twould be, brightened by Max and his young wife. They would all live together,

that it would end by his gaining Mahley's love for himself. He took good care to send no message, and to his utmost he restrained the desire he felt to go to Aussee and see Mahley. The longer she was kept ignorant about Max's movements the better, as it would give her time to feel angry and hurt at the apparent neglect of a lover, who could let months go by without sending her a word, or making an effort to come a few miles to see her.

## V.

WHEN Fritz returned to Gosau, he had opened to his uncle the plan he had hit upon, and Franz well understood that Max should be remaining at home, that of her

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Lotte never looks better than when sitting at her spinning in the snug kitchen, lighted up by the blazing wood piled up in the square, raised grate, upon the ledge of which some savoury mess is sure to be simmering. Near to it Greta sits, keeping a watchful glance on the pot, and every now and then lifting the lid of it so as to send forth an odour round the room, at which the two dogs get up and sniff, and Matthias (who is dozing under the clock) rouses himself to ask what time it is, and then nods off into another doze. In the midst of all this comfort, Max has often to keep down a sigh because Mahley cannot have some share in it, and he wonders whether she is still at Aussee, or whether she has gone to the mill with Hans Crnach. If he could but see her, just have

one glance at her, he thinks he should be quite contented; then he falls to hoping that she is not changed, but thinks as often of him as he does of her. Could Max but know the truth, poor Mahley thinks of little else. Alone with her sick cousin, looking forward and looking back is the one solace she possesses: the present is with her a sorry time. The old woman's long illness having worn out the patience of her relations, they one and all feel that in allowing her to have Mahley they are doing quite as much as is necessary, and they need give themselves no more trouble concerning her.

Left entirely to herself, the poor girl has a hard time of it. Strive as she may, it is impossible that Lisbeth's scanty allowance can supply her numerous wants. All Mahley's own small savings have gone, though there is no new stuff gown to show



for them. The constant solitude and strain upon her spirits seem almost more than she can bear, and at times she gives way, and, hiding her face, she lets the pent-up tears have sway. She so longs for a word from Max; but though on several market-days she has walked into Aussee with the hope of seeing him or somebody from Gosau, it has been in vain, and Christmas is now over, and yet he has neither come nor sent. Neither had she seen Fritz, who had found it impossible to leave the smithy. At Christmas Barbara had begged hard that Max might come home; but Franz, influenced by his nephew, had denied her request, saying that it was best the lad should stay at St. Wolfgang, and have a merry feast-time with his jolly uncle and his pretty cousin.

At length a day came when business obliged Fritz to go to Halstadt, and he

took the opportunity of asking his uncle to let him go on to Aussee and see how his friend Moritz Wallner, who kept the Adler there, was getting on. Franz gave a ready consent, and accordingly Fritz started.

The winter was well advanced. Every inch of ground was hard and dry. The mountains were wrapped in snow; the water was a sheet of hard ice as safe to walk upon as land; nobody stirred out unless forced to do so; therefore Fritz had no difficulty in borrowing a sledge in which he crossed the lake to Obertraun, after which he had to walk to Aussee. And this was no easy matter, for the path, which winds along the mountain-side was rugged and steep, blocked by huge pieces of fallen stone, heaps of frozen snow, and torrents whose rushing force had been suddenly arrested. Regardless of the cold, and paying no more attention to his road

than instinct prompted, Fritz pushed resolutely on ; his heart, his hopes, his thoughts all set on Mahley, and how she would receive him. He had sense enough to know that he had set himself no easy task, but his love gave him courage, and inspired him with a certain confidence that in the end he must succeed.

The cottage he sought stood a little distance out of the town, so he made for the Adler first, where he was well received by his friend Moritz (only too glad of the rare chance of a gossip at that season), and finding that Fritz had another visit to pay, he bade him get it over as quickly as might be, so that they might together enjoy a supper which his wife was desired to prepare in their guest's honour.

It was past four o'clock when Fritz tapped at Mahley's door, an hour regarded in these districts as late, when the day is

done, and rest-time draws near. There was a minute's delay, and then Mahley, being assured by a repetition of the sound that it was something more than the wind, got up from her stool, and, careful not to awaken her cousin, opened the door. For an instant she seemed not to recognise Fritz.

"Well, Mahley!" he said.

"Why, is it thou, Fritz?" she exclaimed, pulling him inside. There was no occasion to ask if she was glad to see him, for her beaming face bespoke her joyous heart, joyous indeed, because now she would hear of Max; of course, he had sent her some message or token, she felt sure of that, and in her gladness she said with a pathos that told its tale of weary days of waiting and longing—

"Oh, Fritz! but the sight of thee is welcome to me. Sit down and tell me all I would know."

While she ran to fetch a chair, Fritz took a rapid survey of the scantily furnished room. "I shall have all the more chance here," he thought; "no one to see or to speak to—oh! I must gain her love." And his heart beat with fresh hope, and his usually grave face grew radiant with smiles, so that Mahley caught the infection, and laughed in her old merry way, as she said, "I can only offer thee a little broth, Fritz, it might warm thee though, and we will soon have a better fire; it is good of thee to have so remembered me," for Fritz had said that, having business at Halstadt, he had walked over to see how she was.

He accepted the offer of the broth, and while Mahley cut the thin slices of black bread into the pipkin, Fritz gave her an account of his uncle, his aunt, and their Christmas doings, but not one word of mention did he make of Max, until Mahley,

who had been all this time on the brink of expectation, made a sudden plunge by saying—

“But what of Max?”

“Oh! he had a jovial time of it at St. Wolfgang.”

“St. Wolfgang?” Mahley echoed inquiringly.

“Yes, at Uncle Matthias’s.”

“Is not Max at home at Gosau with you?”

“With us! why, no, he has not been home since he left; thou know’st when that was,” he added; “the same day you all came down from the Zwieselalp.”

“I thought he only went for a day or two,” Mahley stammered.

“Not he; he went with the hope of getting Matthias to let him take his farm in hand for the winter, and he managed it. He’s more master there now than any one

else. He and Miss Lotte rule it with a high hand, I'll wager."

"Who is Miss Lotte?"

Fritz laughed.

"She is no miss, only I call her so; she thinks because some say that she is the prettiest maiden in St. Wolfgang, there is not her equal in the world. Every one to his liking, say I, but cousin Lotte is not to mine."

"No," said Mahley abstractedly; "tell me all about Max though. Did he leave no message for me?"

"He told me to say that he was there, and likely to remain for a time," Fritz said, feigning hesitation. "I went over there before I came here, I thought he might have some word to send to thee, but there was no getting rid of Lotte for a minute; she thinks she has a right to Max, and to know all about him."

Mahley was silent, and after a minute Fritz went on—

“Thou must not think badly of Max, Mahley, but he is awkwardly placed. Lotte and he have been meant for each other ever since they were babies, and Max knows if he ever married any one else, Uncle Franz would never pardon him. He counts upon her portion as if it were already in his money-bag, and though doubtless Max intends to be true to the faith he plighted with thee, he is a tender lad towards his parents, and Lotte is his mother’s favourite niece. Aunt Barbara dotes upon her; she says ’twould break her heart if the two didn’t come together.”

“She did not say so when Max spoke of me.”

Fritz shook his head.

“Max hath never named thee, Mahley, and for that I blame him. He should have



spoken openly, and not have gone on letting them all deceive themselves and each other."

This Fritz said, hoping to rouse Mahley's indignation, but the attempt was premature, for in a moment she was making a dozen excuses for her lover.

"Well, well, I will say no more," said Fritz; "perhaps I am hard on the lad; but only because I would not have thee grieved, Mahley." He continued, in a graver voice, "I am in the world an orphan, and poor like thyself; and somehow it seems as if thou wert my care. I am a rough fellow, sour and surly to most folk, but I would fain be a brother to thee."

"The good God reward thee for the thought!" exclaimed Mahley, clasping tightly his outstretched hands. "It was Max's wish that for his sake I should love thee."

Fritz's face darkened. "Canst thou not love me on my own account then?" he asked sadly; "we are both very lonely in the world, Mahley."

"We are indeed," she said; "and," she continued, her eyes filling with tears, "until I had Max, I felt to belong to no one, but now——" and she stopped as if her thoughts had carried her away; while Fritz sighed to find how little impression he had produced.

"Nay, Fritz, do not despair," exclaimed the girl; "something within me says, 'All will be well.'" And Fritz, auguring "well" to mean as he wished, answered, "Amen;" and when they parted, it was with the promise that in all cases where assistance was needed, Mahley was to call upon Fritz as upon a brother.

## VI.

BRAVELY as Mahley had kept up during Fritz's visit, the news he had given her tended in no way to raise her spirits. Do what she could, her thoughts were constantly reverting to Max's rich cousin. It was not that she lacked confidence in his love; but she began to fear that she was materially injuring his prospects, and sowing dissension where she had thought to strengthen peace. Fritz had lately paid her another visit; and, seeing the effect his words had produced, he tried by every means in his power to increase it, and finally promised her he would go himself to St. Wolfgang, and bring her back word how matters were really going.

Poor Mahley! never had she been so utterly cast down. Her one wish was to see Max. She knew that her love would

in an instant detect the slightest change in his; but just now that was impossible. Her cousin was slowly but surely dying; and, desperate as her longing might be, she could not leave her to die alone; so she had to trust to Fritz, and watch anxiously for another visit from him, or a message to say that he had been to St. Wolfgang. But day by day passed, and still no end was put to Mahley's suspense. When Fritz had said he would go and see Max, he had meant to do so; but an event happened which had set aside his visit.

One evening, as he and his uncle sat together, the old man said suddenly—

“Fritz, I mean to go to St. Wolfgang myself. I think Max has been shilly-shallying there long enough; it's high time for the wedding-day to be fixed.”

“Unless somebody fixes it for Max, he's not likely to do it for himself,” laughed

Fritz. "The way will be for you and Aunt Barbara to look on it as settled; and you'll mind and keep silent about Cranach's niece, and what I've told you."

"He shan't know I've ever heard of her."

"You see," continued Fritz, "if you and Uncle Matthias say you have both taken his staying there in the same light, and Uncle Matthias says he won't have Lotte made a laughing-stock of, I don't see how Max is to get out of it."

"No; and when he's married, he'll be thankful enough to us for the escape he's had. Ah, Fritz! but thou'rt a knowing rascal!" and the old man shook with laughter at his nephew's cunning.

When Barbara was told of her intended visit, she was delighted. Now all would be well, and she should be amply repaid for Max's absence by the presence of the

young wife he was about to bring home to her. It was decided that they should go to Ischl first, and see Cousin Herman, Max's godfather. "He ought to do something handsome for the boy," Franz said; "nobody's got so much right to his money as we have; and while I'm at Ischl I shall go to Hans Bauer's, and get what things are wanting for the smithy, and see if I can't drive a bargain for the wood we've got to spare. I made up my mind to get more for it than Moritz offers; so, if any one is going to Aussee, they can take a message to him, and tell him so."

"Josef's boy Heinrich is going to Halstadt," said Fritz; "I'll tell him to go on to Aussee, and tell Moritz." A good opportunity of sending a word to Mahley, he thought, but what word? Should it be that his uncle and aunt had gone to Max's wedding? After pondering over the idea

and its probable results, he decided that this should be his plan, and afterwards he would go himself and openly declare his love.

The morning on which Franz and Barbara started was fine and bright, and the two old people, snugly packed in a substantial sledge, rattled off in high spirits.

"It won't be long before there's a change," said Franz, "so if that boy of Josef's is going farther than Halstadt he'd best be off; the ice will give with the first rain."

"I'll look for him at once," Fritz said, and only waiting for the sledge to be out of sight, he set off for old Josef's cottage. Heinrich was quite ready to start, and after telling him what to say to Moritz, Fritz added that he was to go on to old Lisbeth's, there he would find Mahley, and he was to tell her "that Fritz could not leave home because Uncle Franz and Aunt Barbara had

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gone off to St. Wolfgang—gone to Max's wedding," he added to old Josef; "only nobody's to know of it—Max wants it kept quiet for a while."

"A quiet wedding's but a poor look-out," mumbled old Josef.

"Somebody stands in the way or Max would have a gay one," whispered Fritz. "Max's heart is good for a feast."

All this was said by Fritz as if not intended for Master Heinrich's ears, which further decided the boy to repeat every word of it. When up the Alp he had seen a good deal of Max and Mahley, and he felt certain he should make himself doubly welcome and important by giving her this secret intelligence.

"I'll tell her all he says," thought he; "'tis Mahley he means is in the way. I know as much about them as Master Fritz does."



Following his own inclinations rather than Fritz's instructions, Heinrich proceeded to pay his visit to Mahley before he went to the Adler. He found her in the cottage, sitting disconsolate and alone, for her poor old cousin was dead, and had been buried the day before, and Mahley now only waited to hear from Hans Cranach whether she was to go to Bischofs-hoven or whether he wanted her at the Gosau mill. She jumped up at sight of Heinrich, certain that he was the bearer of some news—good news, perhaps. Any way, she was now free to do whatever she wished, and she had decided that in any case she would see Max once more.

Heinrich felt the importance of his mission far too keenly to allow himself to be in any way hurried, and Mahley had to curb her impatience, and allow him to deliver his message in his own way.

"Gone to St. Wolfgang!" she echoed;  
"and for what, I wonder?"

"I know," said Heinrich, with a grave nod of his head; "I know, but you ain't to know, it's a great secret; they've gone to a wedding—Max's wedding," he added, spurred into unwonted activity of speech by the effect his words were producing.

"Did Fritz say it was to Max's wedding?"

"Ja, ja, not to me, but to Uncle Josef. Fritz thought I shouldn't hear, but I did. There will be no feasting because—because of you, you know."

Mahley turned upon the boy a look so fierce and sharp that he hastened to add, "Everybody on the Alp knows he wanted to marry thee, Mahley; but it's of no use trying to go against old Franz. Oh, but he is a terrible one! his roar is like the wind before the storm."

"Hast ever been to this house at St. Wolfgang?" Mahley asked abruptly, paying no heed to Heinrich's description of Franz's notoriously bad temper.

"Ja, it stands opposite the bridge facing St. John Nepomuc. Travellers always ask about the house, perhaps because Lotte is always sitting in the porch pretending to do her spinning. They call her the beauty of St. Wolfgang, but I'd rather have thee for a wife Mahley, and so would Anton and Georg, so I shouldn't fret about Max, Mahley—Max isn't everybody."

"Who said I was fretting?" exclaimed Mahley. "Mind thy business and not me, Heinrich, for I'm cross," she added apologetically. "So take no heed of what I say, and give this message to Fritz, that I am gone to Agata Kraft's, and to-morrow or next day he will see me on my way to Gosau."

"Agata lives close by Ischl," said Heinrich.

"Well, what of that?"

Heinrich paused.

"Thou'll not say that I told thee about Max's wedding?"

"No."

"Then I'll go on to Moritz Wallner's; so good-bye, Mahley, I hope thou wilt be up at the châteaux this summer, 'twill soon be time."

Mahley gave a sigh of relief as the door closed on Heinrich. She sat down for a moment as if to arrange her plans, then starting up, she began to make her preparations for starting on the journey she was bent upon taking. Once more she would see Max, and then she told herself that she would talk to him, and tell him that she wanted him to be happy, she would ask him to let her look upon Lotte,

she would bid him have a gay wedding, she would tell him that she was contented, and in the midst of repeating the words she meant to say she burst into a passion of tears, sobbing—

“Oh, if he but loves me still!—oh, if I do but find him true!” For that happiness she felt she would willingly give her life.

The tears seemed to relieve her, and after a while she renewed her few preparations, turned the key in the cottage door, and started on her walk—rather a long one, but not more than she had often done before, only the road just now was more than usually rugged, and every here and there, from the long slides of frozen torrents, tiny streams were beginning to drip. High above her towered her old friend, the Dachstein, in sight of which she and Max had pledged eternal fidelity. Could he have

forgotten those vows? Never! And recalling each word and look, her heart gained courage. If he remained faithful, why should she give him up? Could any claim be stronger than the love they bore to each other? None! And she hastened on, inspired with a hope that after all things might come as she wished.

That night she remained at her friend's, and the next morning she proceeded on to St. Wolfgang.

"Thou'lt never gain the Gosau mill to-day," Agata said at parting; "'tis better to go on a little farther up the lake, and cross over to the ferry, where old Caspar will take thee in for our sakes."

Mahley, thanking the good soul for her care, turned down the little lane which leads through the farmyard, and was soon out of sight.

Almost at the same hour, by the high

road, Franz and Barbara were setting off; Franz in the best of good humours, because Cousin Herman had said that, if he was asked to the wedding, he'd take care nobody brought a more substantial welcome with them than he did, only the wedding must be soon, for directly the visitors came he must attend to his business. Franz had contrived to send word by a man they passed on the road the day before that they might be expected, and consequently the Wolfgang household was in a high state of expectation, and the best dinner Lotte could produce was got in readiness to welcome the coming guests.

Franz had not been in the house an hour before, by jokes and hints, the object of his visit was made known; and, to Max's horror and confusion, Lotte smiled her acquiescence with all that was said, and Matthias rubbed his hands and roared with laughter. Poor

Max ! what to do he did not know. Turning to the window he stood looking out at a figure in the distance ; but before he could think of anything to say Greta was emptying the broth into the bowl which stood upon the table, and Max had to take the only place left, a seat evidently given to him because it was next to Lotte. Well, he would wait until dinner was over, but not a minute longer ; then he would call his father outside, and then and there tell him of the mistake he was labouring under, and that he was already bound to Mahley. Mahley, in the meantime, had reached the turning to the bridge, in sight of which she stood, hesitating what to do. All her courage had forsaken her, and she could think of no plan by which she might obtain an interview with Max. Her best chance lay in the fact that nobody but he knew her, so if she could but catch sight of him



she might attract his attention. Instead of crossing the bridge she went round, so that she came down into the farmyard; and after some little time she managed to reach a stack of wood, under shelter of which she could look into the window, and have a full view of the assembled party, the old people laughing and jokingly pointing at Max, who looked confused and conscious as he turned towards Lotte, sitting by his side in all the bravery of holiday attire. In a moment a great gulf seemed to open up between these well-to-do, jolly folk, and the poor shivering maiden outside; Max belonged to them, she could not claim him from them, could not take him away to share, with her, poverty and toil. All Fritz had said came back with a new light; she understood him now, and humbly and silently she stole away, retraced her steps, and sat down at the end of the lane in the

stupor which is often the first stage of overwhelming sorrow.

How long she had sat there she did not know. Suddenly she seemed to come to life—to hear her name—to see—yes, yes, 'twas Max—Max who had caught her in his arms, and who was laughing and crying too, as he called her by every name that love holds dear. No more doubt, no more distrust; they had but to look into each other's eyes to read the truth which spoke from both their hearts.

Still there was much to tell and much to hear, and Max drew Mahley on to a less frequented road, where, under the shelter of a shed, they ran little risk of being seen.

It seemed that as soon as the dinner was over Max had asked for a word with his father, and a grand scene had then taken place between them—Franz insisting on his son marrying his cousin, Max as resolutely

refusing. He did not tell Mahley, what seemed to him now plain enough, that Fritz (in whom he had placed such trust) had betrayed him; and Mahley held her peace about Fritz's false insinuations, a motive for which she was at a loss to find. Max said he had stood his father's words as long as he possibly could, until they drove him into telling him that his conscience was clear about Lotte (to whom he had never uttered a word that he might not have said in Mahley's presence), that his taunts and threats were unjust, and until he withdrew them he would not be beholden to him; and in this spirit he had taken a hasty farewell of his mother, who was quite dazed at the unexpected end to her hopes, and had rushed from the house, intending to seek work at Salzburg.

"Ah, Mahley!" he concluded; "would I could take thee with me!"

“And why not? I am willing to go, Max. I have not been used to comforts; I can work, and with thee—oh, but we’ll have a merry time,” and she clapped her hands and laughed for joy.

Max looked grave.

“But, Mahley,” he continued.

“Nay, no buts. I will not leave *thee* now. Agata will give us shelter until we can be married, and then—hand in hand we’ll trudge through the world together.”

“My poor little one, already thou must be tired of trudging, and hungry too.”

“I am hungry,” she said, pulling out a hunch of black bread. “Max,” she added with mock earnestness, “I hope thou eat thy full at dinner, for ’twill be many a day ere thou seest such another before thee.”

Max muttered something against the whole family.

“Let them be,” Mahley said. “I can forgive them, Max, from my heart, and thou wilt do so too; we will harbour no evil, and in time they will love me, and, if not, I have thee. Nothing can part us now.”

## VII.

WHILE Max and Mahley, after the fashion of lovers, were sitting engrossed with each other, Franz was trying to set matters a little right with Lotte and Uncle Matthias; he told them that Max had got some notion into his head that he was bound to this artful wench, who was possessed of the evil eye, he believed, or else she could never have so bewitched the boy, and that he had packed him off to Salzburg, telling him never to show his face to him until he had recovered his senses. Lotte cried heartily, partly from

mortified vanity, and partly for the loss of the neck-chain and ear-rings, which held an equal place in her regard with Max. Barbara, fearful to further enrage her violent husband, tried to control her grief; and Uncle Matthias, affected by the general air of discomfort, took refuge in various schnapps and tankards of beer, until they got the better of his discretion, and he let out that his chief cause of regret was not getting an immediate home for Lotte, whose place as mistress he intended to fill by a certain buxom widow in the village, who he thought would make him a good wife.

Matthias's marriage would very much alter Lotte's prospects, and Franz began to think that he could do better than that for his son at Gosau, so without delay he altered his tone, and told Barbara to be ready to start the next day, as he

thought it was best that they got home again. All in vain Lotte urged him to stay for a day or two longer.

"No," he said, "the weather is breaking up, there is rain in store, and I ought to be back at the smithy."

Barbara, too, was equally anxious to be home; she hoped that thither Max had turned his steps, and if so she would speak her mind to Franz. What harm had the boy done? Chosen a wife for himself. And who had a better right? Barbara resolved to have her say in Max's favour, though Franz killed her the next minute. She shuddered at the bare thought of Max roaming over the country homeless and destitute. "God keep him!" she sighed; "he hasn't been used to trials and temptings, and only they who have know whether they will stand or fall." These thoughts filled the good soul's mind,

as she sat quietly in the fading light, wondering where her son then was.

Not so far off as Barbara supposed, for finding that Mahley was very tired, and that the time had gone much faster than he thought, Max urged her to consent to staying at the ferry with Agata's friend, and then they could start early the next morning. The evening mists were already curling through the valley, making the opposite side of the little lake look hazy and indistinct, and although old Caspar's cottage was somewhat out of the way, Max thought it more prudent to seek shelter there; the hour was early, and they would be certain to find him up. So, talking of their future, rosy with all the hope of youth, on they walked, until they came to a post which indicated that across from here was the ferry. By this it was almost dark, and the thick mist obscured the light



of the rising moon. Without a doubt but that the lake was firm and safe, fearlessly the two stepped upon it. A few minutes more and they would reach the other side ; but before those minutes had passed, there was a sudden crash—a cry—a desperate clinging together ; and so Max and Mahley sank never to rise again. The ice had given way, and in the rush of pent-up waters the lovers were swallowed up.

Aroused by the crackling noise, old Caspar hastened out, but nothing was to be seen. The cry he fancied he had heard could have come from no one. He shouted, but only the echo of his voice came back ; still he did not feel convinced, although he told himself over and over again that strangers wouldn't be wandering at that hour, and that every one round knew that when the lantern, which hung by St. John, wasn't alight, the crossing was doubtful. Thus arguing, he

fell asleep ; but the moon kept watch, and all night long, through the white mists, she looked sorrowfully down upon the calm faces of the two lovers ; and the waters, set free from their long imprisonment, wandered away, and murmured a sad, soft dirge, which the winds caught up and whispering told to the distant mountains ; but those who loved them knew nothing of their fate, and, except by Fritz, for many a long day it was never suspected.

Franz and Barbara returned home, and finding Max had not been there, they concluded he had gone (as he had said he should) to Salzburg. At first, Fritz believed that Mahley was with him ; but at length, unable to bear the torture of suspense, he persuaded Franz (as Barbara was ill again, and for ever moaning that she should never be well until her son came back) to let him seek

for Max; and in his heart Franz was nothing loth, for he longed to know that the boy was safe. Fritz set off, inquiring about the two in all directions. By chance and slow degrees (for Heinrich, fearful of the consequences, had never fully delivered his message), he found out Agata Kraff, and heard how Mahley had been there, and how that on leaving she had directed her to old Caspar's ferry. Then Caspar told his story, and at it Fritz's heart died within him, for something told him that it was Mahley's voice that the old man had heard. After a time he returned to the smithy, saying he had learnt nothing; but he gradually became so silent, broken-down, and altered, that strange stories began to be whispered abroad, and when Franz, hearing of some one who resembled his son, set off to see if it would turn out to be Max, the villagers would gravely

nod their heads, saying, "Fritz knew best that in this world poor Max would never be seen more." Strangely enough, no one connected Mahley's disappearance with Max's; so long a time elapsed before any suspicion about either's safety presented itself, that the fact that they disappeared together was entirely lost sight of; besides which, people were deceived by Franz speaking of his son as being at Salzburg. Franz always believed that his son would return; and although he knew that his wife was dying, he had no patience with her for not being as hopeful as himself. At length, as, one night, he sat by Barbara's bedside watching, the poor old woman suddenly awoke from the stupor into which she had fallen, and starting up she cried out, "Franz, there is Max—Max, our boy!" and saying this she died; and after that time Franz's spirit seemed broken,

and he cared not for his smithy or his inn. He said he knew now that his son was dead, and he was ever ready to tell, to all who would listen, how cruelly he had served his boy, how he had driven him from his sight, and all because he had chosen a wife for himself. He shrank from his nephew, and seemed terrified at his altered looks and strange behaviour, for Fritz wandered about like one possessed. He shunned companionship, and grew more stern and morose as he noted how people eyed and avoided him.

When Franz died every one thought Fritz would sell the smithy, and go away ; but no, a fascination seemed to keep him there ; he dismissed the serving-maid, and, shutting himself up alone, except to buy necessaries, he was never seen in the village.

If any one came to his door, he drove them away. The villagers avoided him ;

they said he had sold himself, and for that reason dared not enter the church or pass beneath its shadow.

Muttering to himself whenever the winds raged or storms threatened, Fritz might be seen hurrying up the mountain-side, as if seeking for some one lost. Sometimes he would stop, and wave his arms, shouting, "Max! Mahley!" At others he would fling himself on the ground, and lay moaning, as if in pain.

He lived to be a very old man, so old that, except by hearsay, none remembered his story. One day he was met wandering in the direction of the Schafberg. A storm seemed brewing, but he took no heed of the men who warned him. Looking back they saw him stop, then shout, and cry, and hurry on.

That night a tempest raged, the like of which had not been seen for fifty years. For

many days hardly a soul dared venture out of doors; and when, at length, they did, among other devastation wrought, the old smithy was found to be a heap of ruins.

Fritz Friedel was never seen again. Whether, missing his path, he had fallen from the mountain-side, or down one of the numerous crevasses, none could say. Many believed he was yet alive and condemned to wander, seeking—but never finding—those who had been the victims of his murderous hate.

His real story was never known; his hopeless grief, his ceaseless remorse remained untold. Hardened by seeing how he was misjudged and how he was thought of, he scorned to tell the truth, until, by brooding over his wrongs and his hapless love, his mind grew weak, and in his frenzies he fancied himself guilty of the crimes of which he was accused. Then,

growing calmer, he would think that Max and Mahley were alive, only hiding; and he would wander away in fruitless search of them.

For a long time nobody was found venturesome enough to rebuild the smithy; but gradually those who remembered Fritz died off, and at length a man from Halstadt plucked up courage, built a new smithy, where a thriving business began, and soon the old occupants ceased to be remembered, and the very names of Hans Cranach and Franz Friedel were clean forgotten. Only when the sky grows dull and leaden, and the wind begins a plaintive moan, souging ominously from the mountains, the wayfarer looks about for some friendly shelter, the goodman pays heed to his cattle, the housewife fastens all securely, "for," say they, "the old man is near, seeking for Max and Mahley."



## LITTLE NAN.



### I.

**I**T was on a summer evening at the end of June that Robert Stapleton, then a young man but little over twenty-one, strolled across the meadows from Redlynch towards the neighbouring village of Crickton-in-the-Hollow.

He had come to say farewell to the home of his childhood and boyhood, having felt it expedient to sell his small estate of Redlynch to secure a sufficient sum to buy a living at some future time. He would have been well contented could he have remained at Crickton, but the rector there was a hale young man, and so Robert was compelled to

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give up that idea, and make up his mind to settle in some place of less interest to him than the quiet village which until the last six months he had called home. It cost him many a sharp pang to give up the old house in which his father had died, leaving him an only child to his mother's care.

Mrs. Stapleton's prayer had been that she might live to see her son a man; and not only was this prayer granted, but her heart's desire was fulfilled by Robert choosing to be a clergyman. She lived until after his ordination, and then, as if her work was complete, she fell ill, and shortly after died, leaving her son with no relations and but few friends, but satisfied that his earnest, thoughtful disposition would fit him for the position he had chosen for himself, that of a rector in a country village.

But before Mr. Stapleton settled into this life of quiet routine, he thought it right to

see something of more serious work, and with this idea before him he had sought and obtained a London curacy, with which he had been actively engaged at the time of Mrs. Stapleton's death, and to which he intended returning at the end of the present week. His lawyer had just found an unexpected purchaser for Redlynch, so that (as its master) this was Robert Stapleton's last visit, and all he did was tinged with an air of regretful farewell. He recalled a thousand endearing recollections of his beloved mother, he repeated to himself her kindly speeches, her acts of piety, her unostentatious charity, rendering again and again grateful homage to her memory in the assurance that whatever was good in him was due to her fostering care.

'Twas in this mood that, on the evening in question, he walked along until he crossed the last rustic stile which divided the three

pleasant meadows between Redlynch lane and the high road, leading to Crickton one way and the neighbouring market-town of Baddeley on the other. At the far end near the road he noticed a small crowd ; approaching closer, he saw that they had gathered round a caravan, in front of which a rude impromptu stage had been erected, whereon a man in a motley kind of make-up was endeavouring to amuse the crowd by some recitations and a few conjuror's tricks, in which last he was aided by a pretty delicate-looking little girl. Mr. Stapleton stopped, and, after watching the pair for a few minutes, he said to a labourer near—

“Going on to Baddeley, I suppose?”

“I reckon so, sir. I see 'em last night outside the town, just by the bridge. I don't know what they was a stoppin' for.”

“There's a woman ill with 'em, sir,” put in a girl, dropping a curtsy to Mr. Robert.

"I heard say down to village she lays a dyin', and our Bill met the little maid cryin' like anything when he was comin' back from school."

"Ah, 'tis a sorrowful life to bring up a child to," said a stout-looking woman; "I'd rather follow mine to the grave than see 'em take up wi' tramps, there's so much falseness wi' 'em, they's most all rogues to heart."

"And everything goes in drink," said her neighbour, making a show of feeling in her pocket as the man approached them leading the child, who held up to each person a small tin plate. The look of mute entreaty in the pale little face touched Robert Stapleton's softened heart, and he dropped in a silver piece, at sight of which the child's face flushed, and the man exclaimed—

"God bless you, sir; thank you, thank you, kind gentleman."

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The eagerness of his speech and his manner showed how little he expected assistance, and how much he stood in need of it, and although (with a natural dislike of letting his charity be seen) Mr. Stapleton turned away, it was only to linger about the field until the small crowd had dispersed, and he should be able to inquire unobserved further into the showman's necessities.

In a few minutes the villagers had gone their way, and then Mr. Stapleton retraced his steps and walked up to the caravan. The door was open, and the man was engaged in putting by the various articles of disguise which during the performance he had worn. As Mr. Stapleton stopped he looked up, and, recognising him, came forward and began to renew his thanks.

"Oh! say no more about that," said the young man; "I came to see if I could do

anything—be of service to you. I heard that you had some one ill with you,” and he looked towards a partition in the caravan.

The man’s mouth twitched, and, notwithstanding his efforts to speak, he was silent for a minute; then he jerked out “Dead.”

“Dead!” echoed Mr. Stapleton; “but not here?”

“No,” and he brought his sleeve across his eyes; “the gentleman I went to told me how ’tud be, and I let ’em take her down there,” and he nodded in the direction of the small workhouse. “If I’d had anythink to keep her from there, I’d never ha’ let her go, but we was cleaned out—cleaned out,” he repeated, turning his face so as to hide it from Mr. Stapleton’s view. “I’ll say that for ’em, they was good to her,” he continued, “and brought her wine and brandy and all sorts, but ’twas

too late, sir; too late. She was a dead woman afore then; all day she'd bin talkin' and sayin', 'When I'm gone, do this, and don'tee do that; for she warn't by any means one of yer common sort—she was the little 'un's mother," he said, lowering his voice.

"Your wife?" asked Mr. Stapleton.

"Yes, sir, my wife; but, lor bless yer, as far above anythink o' my sort as the Lord Mayor's coach is to that ere old carawan. Why, if she'd only had the health and the breath, she'd a bin on the boards o' ole Drury. Bless yer, sir, there's never bin her ekal since at Richardson's, not in my day, and I arn't a missed a Bartlemy Fair for five and forty year—that's my age, sir. I was born on the premises, as you may say; my father bein' in the curiosity line—mermaids, calfs wi' two heads, and animals ajined together. They was his fancy, but niver



mine. No, I took'd more to conjuring and the stage actin', and 'twas at that latter I first met her. Lor, when I think; why, sir, you'd a soon ha' thought o' Queen Charlotte a pickin' up that pin as she stoopin' to me then. Gentleman Jack and her thought nobody was good enough to speak to. Jack was her husband, at least so she thought till number one happens to step in from where she'd bin' for four years or so, through the pocketin' in a fit o' abstraction a little jewelry what had hit her fancy. For a time poor Liz stuck by Jack and believed the lies he told about number one; but Jack he took to drinkin' wus than ever, and he sold their clothes and anybody's else's he could lay hands on, and then he began a kickin' and a cuffin' her cos o' the brat that was comin'. Well there!" he exclaimed, breaking off from his narrative. "I niver lifted my hand agen her, drunk or sober;

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a word from her would turn me into a lamb."

"And what became of this man, the first husband?"

"Died in a fit, sir, the week afore the little one was born. I'd allays managed to keep a eye on 'em, and I was with Salmon's at that time. We war gettin' ready for Greenwich, and they wanted somebody as could be trusted to take the money, and I spoke up for Mrs. Grey, that was the name she went by, sir. Glad enuf she was when they agreed to take her, for she was a broken-down woman by that time, sir—nothing like so bad as after the little un come though; after that she regularly knocked under, and never held her head up for the same. I tried to cheer her all I could, but, lor bless ye, sir, no sooner was one pain cured afore another was beginning, and as Shakespeare has it, 'Where could ye

find a minister for a mind diseased?’ At last I got a chum o’ mine to speak for me, and tell her ’twas best to let me work for all three, which I was willin’ to do, and able too, for I’d a gone shares in a first-rate thing then, the “New and Original Temple of Mirth and Mystery,” which didn’t require nothing which me and my pardner couldn’t manage, as we still do together, and was on our way to Bartlemy Fair. He’s a gone on, sir, expectin’ us to foller, with the proper stage and most o’ the properties, and when we don’t turn up he’ll guess what’s happened, and if he don’t get drunk, why my name ain’t Bill Tomlin. He’s a soft-hearted chap, you see, sir, and they allars tries to drownd trouble—though, so far as that goes, I was never much of a hand at a dry sorrow myself, but somehow meat, and drink too, seems to stick in my throat now, and words don’t come too ready.

I tried to tune up a bit of a song just now, but 'twouldn't do ; and I should ha' gived up altogether, sir, only for the little un there," and he turned towards where the child had been sitting, but she was lying down in the farther part of the caravan, having apparently cried herself to sleep.

"What do you mean to do with her?" asked Mr. Stapleton.

"I can't tell, sir, any more than you can. Her poor mother begged and beseeched that I'd not bring her up in our line. She says, 'Better leave her where she is, Bill ;' but I han't the heart to, sir ; she thinks cos her mother died there that they had the killing o' her someway. I'm sure I can't see how things is to go straight without poor Liz ; she used to set me on me legs, no matter which side I was uppermost."

"It must be a trying life for a young girl to be brought to," said Mr. Staple-

ton, thoroughly interested in the man's story.

“Well, sir, 'tis awkward like when there's no mother and no woman neither; for my chum he's a single man; there's he, and me, and a boy, who's a tacked hisself on to us, and there's the lot. I'm sure I don't know how to act, and I s'pose, sir, you couldn't tell me. She's bin so used to her mother, you see; she'd tend her and wait upon her like a little ole woman, and though she's but nine; she ain't like a child. She says this morning, ‘Oh, Bill!’ she says, ‘don'tee leave me behind—take me with ye, don'tee go to leave me, Bill.’ Not that I iver took much notice o' her, for beyond her bein' poor Liz's child, I don't care much for young 'uns, and if I keeps her I can't do nothin' but 'prentis her out—stilts or circusers takes a gal in now and then; but, lor, you wants interest for that.”

“Poor child!” said Mr. Stapleton; “she seems a nice-looking little thing. I wish I could think of any one who would take her.”

“Ah! that would be a godsend, sir,” sighed the man; “I dare say there is plenty, if we did but know ’em. Talk about charity—the takin’ o’ her, now, would be something like.”

“If my mother had been living, it is just the thing she would have done,” said Mr. Stapleton; “but she is dead, and I have really no home. I wish I had.”

“So do I, sir, for you’ve got a way o’ listenin’ to a man’s troubles that’s emboldened me to take up a good slice o’ your time, axing yur pardin for ’t.”

“Not at all; I’m thinking if I couldn’t do more than listen. Of course you’ll manage for yourself, and get on all right, but the poor little girl—I feel for your

difficulty with her. Some 'charity' might admit her. I tell you what; I'll think it over, and I'll come down to-morrow, and speak to you again."

"Not to-morrow afternoon, sir, cos that's the time they've fixed for poor Liz, and I shall start next morning at daybreak."

"All right. I'll come when you're here; and send the child to me in the morning. The servants shall give her some dinner; and so, if you'll just step this way, I'll point you out the way to my house."

The man did as he was desired, and after showing him the way to Redlynch Mr. Stapleton wished him good evening, and proceeded into Crickton. There he enlisted much sympathy for the showman and his child, but he could find no one inclined to take the responsibility of adopting the little girl, and he was obliged to return home, hoping the troubles of his newly-found

protégés would be alleviated by the goodly store of food and clothing he had been promised for them.

Early the next morning little Nan, as she said she was called, arrived at Redlynch, and her quiet ways and pale pretty face only served to confirm more than ever the wish Mr. Stapleton had to be of service. But how—what could he do? Nothing; and he feared, with the most charitable wishes, he would be obliged finally to let the man go, and little Nan with him. And so it proved; for on going down that evening, he found that poor Bill had not been able to withstand temptation any longer, and after the funeral had slipped away down to the village alehouse, and quite had forfeited every one's good opinion by spending the money sent to him in getting stupidly drunk; so that when Mr. Stapleton arrived to have his final



conversation, he found him lying dead asleep.

"I should not think that you will start very early to-morrow, Nan," Mr. Stapleton said.

"Oh ! he'll be all right by morning, sir," answered the child, betraying her knowledge of Bill's failing. "Mother always let him be ;" and at the word "mother," the grief which she had hushed at Mr. Stapleton's approach burst out afresh, and vainly trying to stifle her sobs, the poor child cried, "Oh, whatever shall I do ?"

"My poor little girl, I wish it was in my power to help you," said Mr. Stapleton ; "but if at any time you are in want of a friend, and in London, apply to me, Mr. Stapleton, Avery Row, Church Street. Shall you remember ? No, I fear not ; I will write it down for you. There," he said, giving her the address written on

paper. "Now keep that carefully, and tell him," pointing to the sleeper, "that I will come to-morrow morning; so that, unless you start very early, I shall see you again. Try to stop crying," he added, patting her kindly; "God has taken your mother away from a life of pain and sorrow, but He will protect you;" and with a few similar efforts at consoling her he took his departure, vexed that he should find it so difficult to express the sympathy he felt.

"My mother would have dried the poor thing's eyes and left her quite cheerful," thought he; "but then women seem to have so much more tact in these matters." All that evening Mr. Stapleton was troubled by thoughts of what was to become of the showman and his child; and he ended in half resolving to propose that she should be left behind, and that he would endeavour to get one of the village people to take

her, guaranteeing to pay for her board and lodging. "I will not tell him this directly," he thought, "because it will do him no harm to think that he is in a way bound to pay for her himself. Then, after a few years, she might be useful in some household service. I should be certain to get her a situation; or if by that time I had a home of my own, I could take her myself."

Pleased with his resolution, as soon as he had finished his breakfast he set off to put it into effect. He felt certain that he should see his friends still there, as it was not nine o'clock; for after Bill's drunken fit he was not very likely to be inclined for an early start. But, to his great dismay, no sooner had he reached the stile than he saw that the field was clear—the caravan no longer occupied its corner.

He hurried into the road, and inquired at

the first cottage how long it was since the party had passed. The woman did not know, but she said the field was empty at six o'clock when she went to fetch her water. Then, to satisfy himself further, he walked on to ask the turnpike man.

"Why, sir, they passed through between half-past four and five. 'You're early,' I says to the man. 'Yes,' he answers, 'I wants to get news o' my mate. We're due at Bartlemy Fair on Thursday.'"

Mr. Stapleton turned away disappointed and vexed; and when, at the entrance of Crickton, he met Miss Parkes, one of the village ladies, he told her his annoyance. "I so wish I had thought of it before," he said.

"My dear Mr. Robert, I'm very glad you did not, for they're just like all those tramps, a set of impostors. Why, fancy, after all the sorrow the wretch pretended,

the story he told to you, and the fuss he made over the poor woman's grave, to go and spend in drink the money we'd sent him for decent necessaries. When Mr. Gould offered to get the child into the workhouse, he spoke quite rudely, and, using really a very profane oath, said he'd keep the little one if they starved together."

"I feel so sorry for that poor child," said Mr. Stapleton.

"Well, then, you need not; for you may take my word for it, she is as artful as she's high. I expect the mother killed herself with drink."

"Why?"

"Why! Why because, my dear Mr. Robert, it's the failing of all these sort of people, and—well, perhaps it's not to be wondered at, poor souls, seeing the miserable lives they lead. Only, I'm very glad

we haven't got that girl among the village children; they're daring enough as it is, without any more bad examples. So don't make your mind uneasy. You're just like your poor mother, always a kind word for those that others turn their backs upon; and so it should be, Mr. Robert, so it should be, for as the saying is, 'We're well kept that God keeps.'" And the little old lady hurried off to look after her sick pensioners, leaving Robert to pursue his walk alone, unconvinced by her arguments, and with a feeling of regret in his heart that he had not been able to do more for poor Bill and his protégée, little Nan.

## II.

It was about ten o'clock on the night of a stormy day in the following March that Mr. Stapleton returned, from dining

with his rector, to his lodgings in Avery Row.

"If you please, sir," said the servant, "there's a little girl waiting to see you."

"A little girl at this hour! Where is she?"

"Missis told me to take her down to the fire, and dry her a bit. She came more than an hour ago. Somebody's going to call for her, she says, but they haven't bin yet."

"Bring her up-stairs, Mary. One of those Kellys, I expect," he said, as he took off his wet coat before going into his sitting-room.

"This way, little girl," said Mary, opening the door, and shutting it behind a forlorn-looking little figure, which advanced holding out a dirty piece of paper.

"Please, sir, Bill ha' sent this to you for to read."

"Bill!" repeated Mr. Stapleton; then

looking down, he exclaimed, "Why, it's little Nan!"

The child gave a faint smile of recognition.

"So, you have found me out, Nan. Go by the fire, child, and let's see what Bill has to say."

Not very much, by the size of the paper, although it seemed to take Mr. Stapleton some time to understand. "Do you know what is in this?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Who brought you here?"

"Bill did, sir—not to the door, but to two streets off. He told me he'd come for me, but I dessay he's forgot."

Mr. Stapleton read the scrap of paper through again.

"Where have you been living lately?" he asked.

"Oh! a long way off, sir, ever so far—first to one place and then to another. Bill



thought he'd get took on at the pantomime, but he wasn't; they only took Wig."

"Is he Bill's partner—the man who used to perform with him?"

"Ginger do ye mean, sir? Oh no! Wig's the boy what took to follerin' us years ago, and he's 'most kep us this winter. Ginger and Bill's parted, cos, after Barrow fair, Ginger cut off with the hosses, and sold 'em."

Mr. Stapleton returned to another perusal of the note, in which he was disturbed by Mary opening the door.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought I heard the front door shut. I only came to ask if you'd be pleased to want anything to-night."

"No, I don't want any thing, Mary; but I don't know what to do with this child. The person she was with seems to have left her here."

"You said the man was to call for you, didn't you?" asked Mary.

Nan nodded her head, and turning to Mr. Stapleton, she said, "If he went into a public, he's safe to forget all about me; but don't you mind that, sir; I can find my way back to where he left me; and I'll look about to see if I can see 'im. If not, he'll remember me all of a sudden, and p'raps come for me here; so please say I'm a waitin' where he sot me down."

"You didn't come in the caravan?" said Mr. Stapleton.

"No, sir, we walked; only," she added apologetically, "my feet was so sore at the last that Bill he carried me a bit."

"Poor lamb!" said the landlady, who had just come in, "I don't believe she's had a bit o' food inside her for the day. Do you know anything about her, Mr. Stapleton?"

“ Oh, yes ! I know her,” and beckoning Mrs. Smithson aside, he gave an outline of his previous knowledge of Nan, and how he had made her acquaintance. “ The awkward part is contained here,” he said, handing the piece of paper to her to read :—

“ HONORD SIR,” it ran—“ You toud Nan that if she ever need a frend you was that won. She have no frend but me, and I the wust cos of the drink havin’ masterd me all together, which, if I goes to Ameriky, havin’ a orfer from a gent in my walk, I thinks I should get the better off myself; but I carnt take the little ’un, and know, havin’ a tride it, that in a leavin’ her to the workus I brakes down; so all I axis of you Honord ginemen, is to see her into a wurkus as comfortible as you knows on, and to brake it gintle to her about Ameriky, and say I’ll be back soon, witch it isn’t likely .

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in this wurld, threw ole Ginger, tho' in generil a peasable man, havin' a givin me a horful blo in my insides wich leves me not the man you knew for, Honord Sir, if you never heers agin you'll know 'tis along o' Ginger's kik or threw bein' dround.

“Your humble servant to command,

“BILL TOMLIN.”

“Well, I never did!” ejaculated Mrs. Smithson; “the way people set upon you to impose is dreadful, sir. The idea o' sending her at this time of night. 'Tis nothing but a trick, mark my words for it; if not, why not have brought her like a man? Nasty drunken beast to forsake his own flesh and blood. The poor thing hasn't got no mother, then?”

“No; neither is this man her father. I wish myself that he had come with her, but as wishing won't bring him, Mrs. Smithson,

we must find her a bed for the night, and to-morrow I'll see what is to be done. Nan," he said, "I don't think Bill intends coming for you to-night; you will have to stay here. Mrs. Smithson is kind enough to make room for you."

"Thank ye, sir," said the child, with that ready acceptance of good or evil shown by those whose will or desire has never been consulted.

"Shall she come with me, 'm?" said Mary. "I don't mind," she added, as a look from Mrs. Smithson conveyed her opinion that poor Nan would not be generally welcomed as a companion.

"Thank you, Mary," said Mr. Stapleton, with an approving nod towards the girl, "I'm very much obliged to you."

"Oh, sir! I knows what 'tis to be pushed about; there was six on us at home, and mother a widow. Come along," she said,

holding out her hand. "Say good night to Mr. Stapleton."

"Good night, Nan ; to-morrow I'll have a talk with you, and then if Bill does not come we must try and find him."

Before Mr. Stapleton had his talk with Nan, he went to consult Mrs. Cleave, the rector's wife, as to the best thing to be done with Nan. Mrs. Cleave was at once interested. "What a pity," she said, "that she had not come last month ! We might have got her into Lady Dartford's School instead of Jane Hicks ; it would have really been a greater charity. The girls there are so nicely brought up, and get such good situations. I cannot bear to think of the workhouse for her."

"Neither can I. I wonder if she would have any chance at the next election ?"

"I should think she would ; Miss Howell would be sure to canvass for us,

and so would the Norths; only we must find out that this man really means what he says; it would never do to have him running after her every now and then, and unsettling her."

"Certainly not; I should put a decided stop to anything of that kind. I'll try at once to find him out. I shall learn from the child where they have been living."

With this object in view Mr. Stapleton questioned Nan most closely; but he could learn nothing beyond the fact that after Stroud fair was over they stopped at Chatham, because there Bill was "took bad," and Wig got "took on" at the Christmas pantomime. While at Chatham they had lived at Sliccats Hill, and Bill took up with the crockery selling; but after that she knew nothing of the names of the places they had passed through, only that they had been on the tramp ever since.

Sometimes Bill sold things ; sometimes he and Wig acted as tumblers in the streets, or did tricks in the public-houses. One way and another, they had contrived during the past winter to make a scanty living. They had only been a few days, perhaps a week, in London, and then far, far away from where she now was, close by the waterside. On the previous day she and Bill had come by themselves to Mr. Stapleton's. They had walked through nothing but streets until they came to the place where Bill got the letter wrote, and there she had fallen asleep. She felt such perfect confidence in Bill's coming for her, that even when a part of the letter was read to her she was not satisfied that she should not find him at the spot where the evening before they had parted, and to humour her Mr. Stapleton asked Mary to go with her that she might feel satisfied that he was



not there. With a very disappointed face, poor Nan returned from her search.

“She sees now that he was hoaxing her, sir,” said Mary; “for she went up one street and down another full a dozen times if she did once, and they was all within a ten minutes’ walk of one another.”

“I’m afraid, Nan,” said Mr. Stapleton, “that Bill intended to leave you and intended that you should stop with me.”

He could not find the heart to tell her the whole story, and kept back until later on that Bill had gone to America, and entirely omitted that he had ever mentioned her being sent to the workhouse.

“Yes, sir,” answered Nan, “but I can’t do that; if you’ll only let me go, sir, I shall be sure to find him somehow, cos I know Wig ’ll be lookin’ out and cheekin’ Bill finely for lettin’ o’ me go.”

Mr. Stapleton shook his head. “You

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have no idea how large a place London is, Nan ; and besides, Bill says in his letter that he has had an offer to go to America."

"So he has, sir ; they'd take he and Wig too. Wig told me so."

"Yes, but they could not take you, and as Bill did not like to tell you so, he left it for me to do. I would much rather he had brought you himself, Nan, then I could have spoken to him. As it is, we must try and find Bill, and see if he has really gone to America ; and in the meantime you must be a good girl, Nan, and stay wherever I send you."

Poor Nan's tears were falling fast by this time, and it was some time before she could get out—

"Please, sir, you're very kind, and I'll do whatever you tells me to ; only please, sir, you *will* try and find Bill, cos when he's sober he's very good to me, and

nevir beat me nor nothink when he wur drunk."

"I'll promise you to try and find him, Nan; and then we'll see what we can do for you both."

Thus assured, Nan recovered her spirits, and won golden opinions from Mrs. Smithson by her handiness and steady ways. Mrs. Cleave interested other people in Mr. Stapleton's "little girl," and presents of clothes were sent, so that Nan looked quite a different child.

"I declare anybody wouldn't know her, sir, for the same," said Mrs. Smithson; "and she goes about as happy as a queen. She seems to have forgotten all about that imposing creature she's left behind."

"Ah! missis wouldn't say that if she slept with her," said Mary, happening to overhear Mrs. Smithson's remark. "There ain't a night but she's wonderin' if Mr.

Stapleton has heard o' Bill, and she'll start up in her sleep, callin' out 'Bill, Bill!' or else she'll say she's sure she heers Wig a callin' her. And 'tison't that she's a ungrateful dispositioned child, sir, for she'll do anything for a kind word."

"I think none the worse of her remembering her old friends, Mary," said Mr. Stapleton; "but I doubt much if I shall succeed in seeing anything more of Mr. Bill."

And, notwithstanding the inquiries he made, Mr. Stapleton never again did see anything more of that worthy. After a time he and Mrs. Cleave decided that at present the workhouse idea was to be abandoned, and Nan was to be kept until such time as another vacancy occurred in Lady Dartford's school. This vacancy they unfortunately did not succeed in obtaining, but through some friends of

Mrs. Cleave's an offer came from a Miss Grant to take Nan, board, clothe, and educate her for forty pounds a year. Miss Grant further offered at the expiration of four years to reduce this charge one half, and at the end of two years more to take Nan as an assistant in her school, and pay her an increasing salary. Miss Grant was known to be a lady of unexceptional character, charitable, just, and quite the person to have young people under her charge; and as two ladies came forward and volunteered to pay between them one half the yearly sum, Mr. Stapleton very willingly agreed to pay the remainder, and, all being settled, Nan had to bid adieu to her newly-found friends, and was soon installed at Miss Grant's Seminary for Young Ladies, Sycamore House, Epsom. The child cried very bitterly at parting with Mr. Stapleton, but, with the exception of Mary, she dis-

played neither regret nor fondness for any of her own sex. Indeed, when she was asked, "Are you not sorry to go away from us, Nanny?" by one of the most gushing of the curate's many admirers, she quite shocked her questioner by answering, "No, mum."

"What, not sorry to leave Mr. Stapleton, who has been so kind to you?"

Nan's lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears, but as she said nothing, the lady gave a grave—

"Oh, fie! I am sorry to think you are not a grateful little girl."

At parting Mr. Stapleton promised Nan that he would go and see her, and when she had been at Epsom rather more than a year he paid his promised visit. One July day he arrived at Sycamore House, and had a long talk with Miss Grant, whose worst complaint against Nan was that she feared

that she was not of a grateful disposition, and would prove stubborn. Miss Grey, as she was now called, was sent for, and, overcome with fear of Miss Grant, Nan scarce could find a word to say to Mr. Stapleton, who told her that he had come to bid her good-bye, as it was his intention to travel for a year or two, his health having been considerably impaired by an illness he had had in the winter. He said nothing about removing Nan from Miss Grant's, neither did he tell any one that one of the annual ten pounds had been withdrawn, and that there seemed every probability of his soon having the whole burden of the forty pounds payment on his own shoulders. He felt a little disappointed that Nan had not evinced more pleasure at seeing him, little thinking of the pent-up misery which kept the child dumb.

To Nan the routine of school life was a

weariness almost too great to be endured ; and she found it small alleviation of her trouble to be constantly reminded how much gratitude was due from her to Miss Grant in allowing her to receive the same advantages as young ladies whose parents could afford to pay the liberal sum demanded for them. Miss Grant fully believed she was doing a very charitable action in bringing up Nan to earn her own living at the small cost of forty pounds. She pretended to know nothing of poor Nan's early career, except that since she had lost her mother she had been exposed to the hardship of associating with inferior people, who had neglected her, and allowed her to adopt their own habits and manner of speech. Naturally reserved and silent, Nan was in constant dread of opening her mouth, fearing she might say something which would draw down a rebuke from somebody ;



not a girl in the school but took credit to herself for correcting "a poor child taken out of charity, whose faults they must take warning by, and strive to mend." Many a time did Nan's heart swell within her as she recalled the past time, whose brightness each day seemed to increase. She gradually forgot the rags, the dirt, the discomfort. Warm and well fed, the remembrance of hunger and nipping cold died out, and the picture ever present to her mind was one of unrestrained enjoyment—the fun and frolic of the glaring fair, with its shows and sights and toothsome fairing, and the lazy content of the country, when the old horse would jog along, with Bill nodding over the slackened reins, while she and Wig ran races, chased butterflies, or filled themselves with the fat juicy blackberries that lined the road. What life could be happier than this one, of whose joys and

sorrows she was forbidden to speak? Who cared for her now? Nobody in the school, and nobody out of it; and now that Mr. Stapleton was going away, Nan's cup of sorrow overflowed, and her pillow was wet with the tears which welled up from her lonely forlorn little heart. Hope had hitherto sustained her that some day Mr. Stapleton would come to take her home with him, and would tell her some news of Bill or Wig. All these hopes seemed crushed now. During his visit Miss Grant's presence had kept the poor thing from inquiring after her old friends, and she could only maintain a show of decent behaviour by preserving a strict silence; a silence which Mr. Stapleton, influenced by the accounts he had heard, mistook for indifference, so that, without withdrawing his aid, his interest in his protégée was lessened, and he made no

opposition to Mrs. Cleave's argument that, with regard to Nan, it would be best to make Miss Grant the sole medium of information.

"If," she said, "we keep up a communication with a girl so dispositioned, I fear she may unconsciously come to regard herself as having a claim upon you; and I think, whatever you may feel inclined to do for her, it is best to bring her up with the conviction that she has to trust solely to herself for her future living."

Thus it was, that in the years which saw Nan pass from childhood to girlhood, she almost wholly lost sight of her benefactor; but time, which blotted out much from her memory, still left clear and sharp the names of Bill and Wig; and her keenest enjoyment was when holiday-time came, the boarders having gone home, Miss Grant and the teachers being away, and only she and

the two servants left behind, she was free to wander off across the downs and through the lanes.

The downs were her principal resort, because there she caught glimpses of her free child life, and one day she actually fell in with the proprietor of a show whose eccentric appearance she at once recognised as the "Yaller Dwarf." Emboldened by no one being in sight, Nan entered into conversation with this lady, Mrs. Rumball by name, and to her great amazement finally made herself known to her. Mrs. Rumball had a sensible, warm heart in her stunted little body, and though she rejoiced in what she called Nan's "good luck," she advised her to have "nothin' to say to any o' our sorts, me dear, 'cos 'twon't do, now you looks the lady." Still she was pleased that Nan should have remembered her; also, that she should still feel kindly towards Bill and

Wig. "Alive!" she said, "to be sure, and why not? They says that young Wig 'll make his fortin a dancin' on the ropes. Nothin' comes amiss to un, for if the rascal can't catch hold with anythink else, he hangs on with his hilids. Certainly, me dear, I'll be sure and tell 'em, if ever I sees 'em, what a lady you's grow'd to, and that they'd niver know ye no more than I did myself."

Meeting Mrs. Rumball was a great event in Nan's life. It revived her hopes, and gave her something to think of. She pictured to herself meeting Bill and Wig, as she had met the little dwarf, and she felt certain she should recognise them. She laughed over the surprise it would be to them should they not remember her. But one, two, three years passed, and though Nan in separate days had spent whole weeks upon the downs, she never again saw

any one she knew, neither did any tidings of her old friends reach her.

She was now very nearly seventeen. In another month Mr. Stapleton would have paid his last instalment to Miss Grant. He was still abroad, kept there by the delicate health of the lady whom he hoped in the spring to marry. Accident had thrown them together the winter before, and the friendship which then commenced had since ripened into a sincere attachment. Robert Stapleton had never met any one to whom he could speak so unreservedly as to Grace Stanley, and soon she was informed of all the events of his life, the story of Nan not being omitted. Grace thoroughly approved of all that had been done for the child, but she saw no reason for the silence Mr. Stapleton had been counselled to maintain towards her. It was the surest way, she said, of checking all gratitude in her, and

she determined that while they were in London they would go to Epsom and see Nan. But it was not destined that Grace Stanley should ever again set foot upon her native land. A sudden change of temperature produced an inflammatory cold, distressing symptoms soon followed, and, after a few weeks of heart-rending suspense, Robert Stapleton found himself bereft of the one being whose existence seemed necessary to his happiness. Life without Grace was almost insupportable. She had become, as it were, a portion of himself. All the brightness of his future was centred in the thought that they were to be together; without her, everything lost interest. So that when, about a fortnight after Grace's death, he received a letter from Miss Grant, its contents affected him but very little.

Miss Grant wrote to tell him that Nan had suddenly disappeared in the most

mysterious way. All possible search had been made for her, but as yet no clue had been discovered. A few days later there came a letter from Mrs. Cleave, in which, after speaking of the recent sorrow which had befallen him, she said—

“I am more grieved than I can tell you that you should just now be worried by the disappearance of that ungrateful girl. Knowing how anxious you would be that a thorough search should be made, I went to Epsom myself, and by that means I got hold of a distinct clue to her flight. It seems that for some little time the servants had noticed a young man hanging about the house, and after Nan had gone, and inquiries were being made in the village about her, they found that she had been seen talking with a person answering to his description. He had, they said, a quantity of peculiarly bright curly hair, and the moment the hair



was mentioned I thought of the boy she used to speak of as Wig. There is no doubt but in some way these creatures have contrived to find her out, and to decoy her away. It is a sad thing for the girl, and no doubt, when too late, she will awaken to her folly. Otherwise, I have little pity for her; for, from Miss Grant's account, she lacked all sense of gratitude; and, though she was there so many years, she seems never to have made a friend, neither had she any companion."

"Poor Nan!" sighed Mr. Stapleton, in a regretful tone. "I suppose the old proverb is a true one, 'What's bred in the bone—' Well, I did what I could for you, poor child! Perhaps I should have been wiser to have left you among your own class, for coldness and loneliness is often harder to bear than poverty and hunger."

## III.

TWENTY years had gone by since the day that Robert Stapleton had heard of the flight of his protégée, Nan; but never a word had come of her, and she had ceased now to be anything more than the heroine of a little story which the prematurely aged rector used to tell to his little nieces and nephews; for the children were wont to name him uncle, although no tie of blood united them. They were the children of Grace Stanley's only sister, who, after Grace's death, had married her cousin, the son and heir of a baronet, with a living in his gift. Grace had always been Sir John Stanley's favourite niece, and when she made choice of Robert Stapleton, Sir John decided to give into Robert's keeping the living of Maryton.

"He must take our name," he had said,

“and they must travel about until Cousin Mark ” (the then rector) “ dies.”

Cousin Mark lived on for nearly ten years, but Sir John, then on his deathbed, was quite happy to think that he could secure to Robert the living which he had always meant for Grace’s husband. Old Mark’s conscience, too, had been made quite easy by the reflection that all the wrongs his lax propriety had led to would now be remedied.

“Robert’s a fine fellow,” he would say, “and I know he’ll set everything straight far better than I could have done.”

Therefore, for the last ten years, Robert Stapleton had discontinued using his own surname, and now signed himself Robert Stanley. He had never married, although now, when his health was becoming daily more delicate, and, from being unable to go much into society, his evenings more and

more lonely, he wondered if he would not have been wiser had he asked some good kind woman, who might have cheered and brightened his declining years, to be his wife. Lady Stanley often sighed over Robert's dull home, and wished in her heart that he had a companion; for his physician had said that in all probability he would live for many years to come, if he was careful, avoided excitement, and had cheerful domestic surroundings. So fond of him was she, and so beloved was he by her husband and her children, that they would have had him come and spend every evening with them; but this the rector would not do, not finding himself equal to mixing with the gay circle which the Stanleys collected round them. Just at this very time their house was filled with visitors, and the whole village was in a bustle and commotion on account of the

noted fair which took place on St. Luke's day. For generations it had been, and still was, the fashion for the lord of the manor of Maryton to open the fair in person, and Lady Stanley generally contrived to assemble a goodly company round her, who, together with Sir Thomas, their children, and the rector, walked from Maryton House through the little village street to the fair-field. Here their approach was greeted by the village band, who followed at a respectful distance, playing appropriate tunes; while the great folks received the homage sure to reward those who show a ready sympathy with the enjoyments of their dependents and inferiors. It was not only to the villagers that the presence of the gay party gave satisfaction; the proprietors of booths and shows, and players, were equally delighted; the spangled dancers, the clown, the motley tumblers, and

ferocious baron, all stood cap in hand; the dwarf clambered on a chair to look out of the shutter window, and the fat lady waddled to the door to get a peep through its chink. Generally a halt was made before the most distinguished shows, where the party entered to see some desperate tragedy of high life, in which murder, vengeance, vice punished, and virtue made happy, was satisfactorily brought to a termination in about a quarter of an hour.

Uncle Robert, with the little ones hanging around him, was usually to be found before the sweetmeat stalls, from whose tempting display the children were told to make their own choice. Many a little heart did the kindly rector make glad by his packet of fairing or bag of gingerbread nuts; and as he moved along quite a train of urchins was sure to be seen following in his rear. The swinging-boats, the merry-

go-rounds, all found equal favour in the eyes of the rector and the children. Oft-times a covert censure was passed that the money might be devoted to a more worthy cause; but the poor listened to none of these remarks. They loved their minister none the less because they saw he loved to see them happy, and many a poor mother blessed him in her heart as she watched the screaming delight of her ragged brood of children. Even the old pensioners, offering their battered telescopes as an inducement for seeing "the whitened bones of them cruel and revengeful pirates as is hangin' on gibbets for bloody murders committed on the 'igh seas," were not forgotten by the rector. "No, my men; no, thank you," he would say as he turned round to survey the well-known prospect; and the "Thankee, yer honour!" "God bless yer honour!" as he turned away, made Lady

Stanley shake her head, saying, "You're up to your old tricks again, Robert, encouraging those old wretches to frighten the children into fits."

"My dear Charlotte, it's only once a year, and really they're getting very aged."

"Quite time they reformed, then, and you ought to set them an example. Although," she added aside, "indeed, it is not I would have him alter."

In the afternoon the servants at the great house had their turn at the fair, Lady Stanley not giving her sanction to any one belonging to her household taking part in the revelry which set in at a later hour, when the masqueraders began to fill the dancing booths, and boisterous mirth and uproarious noise took the place of the earlier fun and frolic. The elder children were allowed to accompany the nurses, and at the end of the afternoon in question they



came home full of the wonderful things they had seen. The girls were enchanted with the fairy; the boys rather sneered at this fanciful exhibition, and expended their enthusiasm on a certain Signor Slacropa, "champion chief of the Chimbarazo Mountains."

"Uncle Robert," cried Master Dick, "could you bend your back so, and then get your head, hind side before, through your heels, so, and go on turning like that all the while you were standing on the tight rope, waving the union-jack with each hand? Well, that's what he's going to do this evening."

"Nonsense, Dick."

"Ah, but it isn't nonsense at all, for the man outside told us so, and he said if we couldn't come ourselves, to be sure to let all our friends know what was going to happen, because, as his Gracious Majesty

King George III. had a great desire to see this unrivalled performance, Signor Slacropa might be called off to St. James's Palace, he couldn't say when. There now, that doesn't look like nonsense; and Jim, our groom, says he'd give a guinea, if he had it, to see him."

"Uncle," cried Lottie, "I wish you could have seen the little fairy; she——"

"Oh!" broke in Master Dick, "how you girls do bother about that fairy! Uncle would have been ever so much better pleased with the Signor. He stood on one leg like that, and held up the other like——"

But at that instant down went Dick, chair and all, making such a crash that his mother came running across the room, declaring it was too bad of nurse to take the children to see those tumblers, for they always endangered the breaking of their

limbs in trying to imitate them afterwards. Soon after order was restored, dinner was announced, to which the rector had consented to stay, so that it was past ten o'clock before he rose to take his departure. Then, lantern in hand, he sallied forth along the road which led him to the rectory. Looking back, he could see the light and hear the noise of the fair; and every now and then some reveller who had outstayed his time hurried past him. Just coming out of the gate he met his servant.

"Oh, sir!" she said; "Hicks has just run up to say that one o' the fair people's taken terribly bad. They sent for Dr. Spain, but he's away to Pointer's Hill. Hicks says he's sure the man's struck with death, sir; and he wondered whether you could not do something for him."

"Is Hicks here?"

"Yes, sir, please," answered the watch-

man himself. "I thought I'd step up and speak to yer, sir; they's got the looks o' bein' respectable people; 't isn't drink or nothink o' that sort, sir, he's a gived hisself a jerk or a strain, and I rather think that something in his inside's a givin' way. His wife says he's bin threatened with it afore. He's one of these tumbler chaps, sir."

"Dear, dear; I'll go with you, Hicks," said the rector.

"Thank'ee sir, but 'tis a terrible uproar for ye, and a awful place for sickness to seize anybody in."

The rector did not answer, he was intent on hurrying to the spot, and he knew that quick walking and talking would never do if he intended to have breath enough left to speak to the injured man. They were not long in getting to the fair-field, and Hicks managed that the rector should not be over-jostled in his way through the booths, now

flaring with light. The village crowd of the morning had given place to a mob of disorderly rioters, from whose coarse jokes and rude fun the simple rector shrank abashed. Men dressed in women's clothes anticked about with others who had disguised themselves under hideous masks, on to which, in honour of the fair, they had fastened huge horns. In place of the gay stalls of fairing, with the invitation of "buy, buy—taste and try before you buy; buy," vendors of hot sausages, fried fish, and baked potatoes, bawled forth their wares and drowned the cry of "spiced beer," "flip," and "egg hot, egg hot," all largely patronised.

Had it not been for Hicks's protection the poor rector might have met with some rather rough usage; as it was, he reached the spot he was bound for with no greater offence than such as was given to his eyes and his ears. The caravan to which the injured man

had been taken was at the far end of the field, and was one of several set aside for domestic use.

"The gentleman I spoke of 's come," said Hicks, in a whisper, to the woman who opened the door.

"Oh! is it the doctor?" she asked hurriedly.

"No, he isn't the doctor, but he'll do him as much good and more, I reckon."

"I am sorry that the doctor has been called away to some distance," said Mr. Stanley coming forward, "but if I can be of any service to the poor man I shall be very glad."

"Thank you, sir; you are very kind," she answered, trying to stifle a disappointed tone; "but I want to know if I could safely move him?"

"Move him! where do you want to take him?"

"We have a room at the Bugle Horn, sir, and he would be so much better off there; the noise here distracts him. Besides, this isn't our van, and the people will be wanting to lie down in it as soon as the fair's over."

Mr. Stanley went over to the side of the bed where the sufferer lay. He was still in the fleshing suit in which he had been performing; the neck collar was unbuttoned to give him air, and the water that had been thrown over his face had smeared off a portion of the ochre and whitening with which he had been "made up." He was a large-made man, but he seemed much emaciated, and now so weak as to be hardly able to speak.

"Was he ill before this accident occurred?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" answered the wife; "he has been ill off and on for more than two

years. The doctor he went to said he was never to over-exert himself in any way, but he couldn't help it now and then. He is an acrobat, sir; and of late he has felt so much better that this evening he was tempted to do rather more than usual."

"If I could but get a little rest I should be all right again," the sick man said in a weak voice.

"Where is it you feel pain?" asked the rector; "don't try to speak, put my hand to the place."

"It comes on in spasms," gasped the man, pressing Mr. Stanley's hand against his heart, "and then the beating stops, and I feel as if I should die."

"Just so. Well, try now and be as quiet as you can, and I think we may manage to move you."

He went to the door and called to Hicks, directing him to go back to the village for



further assistance; then returning, he sat down by the side of the sick man, and entered into conversation with the wife. From her he discovered that the sufferer was the identical Signor Slacropa with whose wonders Master Dick had been so pleased.

“My little nephew came home delighted with your husband’s performance,” said the rector.

“Yes, sir; he is as good as most in his line; only he dare not do his best now, because the doctor says it’s too much exertion for him, and told him he ought to give it up altogether; but you see, sir, it’s our living.”

“Are you engaged in the fair?” asked the rector.

“No, sir.”

“Not been accustomed to this kind of life, perhaps?” he continued, struck by the woman’s superior manner.

"Oh, yes, sir! I have been used to it all my life."

"Indeed!" and again Mr. Stanley took occasion to look at her.

Her appearance was as striking as her speech and behaviour. Instead of the dirty slipshod untidiness, mixed with tawdry finery, her dress was neat and becoming. It was unnecessary for the rector to discover that the stuff gown was of a coarser material than that usually patronised, nor that her kerchief and apron were open to like criticism. Sufficient for him that all was neatly and carefully arranged. Her hair was smoothly drawn up from off her face, and surmounted by a mob with a small knot of ribbons. Without being pretty, she had delicate features and a pleasing expression; and Mr. Stanley had just begun to conjure up certain possibilities, when Hicks returned with the

necessary help and an impromptu stretcher. An end was thus put to everything but the easiest way of conveying the sufferer to the village inn, to which place Mr. Stanley accompanied him.

"I shall call early to-morrow morning to see how you are getting on," he said, as he prepared to take his departure; "and I hope by that time Dr. Spain will have been able to see your husband. I won't disturb him," he added, looking compassionately at the worn, pinched face.

"I'm not asleep, sir," said the poor man, stretching out his thin hand; but the gratitude he wanted to express died away before his lips could form the words, and he could only give a choked sob, as he said faintly—

"Nan, Nan! tell the gentleman—speak for me."

"Not a word, not a word!" said the

rector, pressing the hand which had no strength to return his grasp. "Good night, now, to both of you, and early to-morrow I will come again."

He walked slowly down the stairs, and out to the street door. At the door he paused, half turned, took another step forward, and then, apparently unable to resist some impulse, reascended the stairs, and knocked softly. The door was opened by the wife.

"I am sorry to disturb you, but you did not tell me your husband's name. I always like to know people's names."

"Yes, sir; Smith, if you please."

"Ah, yes! Smith to be sure; and his Christian name?"

"I think it's James, sir; but indeed I'm not sure, for he's always been called Wig."

"Ah, yes! Thank you. That will do," and the rector hurried away.

He had now no further doubt but that he and his former protégée, Nan, were again thrown in each other's way. Directly he had noted the superiority of the woman, the possibility of this being the case had presented itself. This was further confirmed by hearing her called Nan; and now the husband's name had settled the matter. Amid the rector's surprise at this discovery, he at once determined that he would not mention a word of it to any one.

"They shall continue to think me a stranger," thought he; "as such I am more likely to hear the truth from them, and to discover whether they are worthy of more than passing charity. Poor Nan! you do not look as if your life had been a pathway of roses."

But then he reflected that her quiet manners and movements were all in her

favour. Unknown to her or to any one, he resolved to watch her, and if he found her anything like what she seemed to be, she should not want a friend as long as he could help her. Such reflections, leading to old memories and to bygone days, prevented the rector having a very good night, and he was up unusually early the next morning; and so impatient was he to learn something of the chances which had befallen Nan since the time when she left Miss Grant's, that he had breakfast fully an hour before his usual time. Then he at once set off to pay his promised visit. At the entrance of the village he met the doctor, and from him he learned, what he already feared, that there was no hope of Wig's recovery, and very little prospect of his rallying from his present attack.

“He may go off at any moment,” said

the doctor. "The most unforeseen thing may cause another spasm, and he has no strength left. I have told the wife that she must carefully avoid all excitement. She seems much superior to the general run of these people."

"So I thought. I am just going in there now."

"Well, tell her I'll look in again during the evening. It's of no use worrying the poor fellow with physic. You're the best doctor in this case. I saw you'd sent in a basket of things to them. He ought to take plenty of nourishment."

When Mr. Stanley went into the sick room, although Nan said only a few words to him by way of thanks, her manner told him how deeply she felt his kindness. He sat down by the bedside, and began talking to the sick man, hoping that some opening would be made by which he might make his

inquiries. Mention being made of the fair, Mr. Stanley said, turning to Nan—

“I think you said that you had been accustomed to fair life?”

“Yes, sir. I believe I was born in a caravan. My father and mother were both players.”

“Then there is a great deal of credit due to them for bringing you up so well, for I can perceive that you are better educated than most young women in your station.”

“Ah, sir! I’m afraid that credit is not theirs, neither is it much credit to me. I very ill repaid the gentleman who gave me the means of knowing what I do.”

“Indeed! And how was that?”

“’Twasn’t her fault, sir,” said Wig, joining in the conversation; “’twas me got her away from the school. I thought I was doin’ a fine thing then; but it’s often ris up against me since, sir, when I’ve sin her like



a fish out o' water, wi' nobody to speak to, for there ain't them amongst our lot for anybody brought up respectable to take up with."

"Did your father and mother consent to your marrying?" said the rector.

"They were dead, sir, and I had nobody to look to except a man my mother had married. My mother died at a little village in the country, and there a gentleman took a fancy to me on account of my being so forlorn, and when he left he gave me his name and address in London, telling me if I was ever in want to come to him. Bill—that was the name of my step-father, sir—kept the address, and one day he took me to a street close to where this gentleman lived, and told me to take a slip of paper to him. He said he would wait there for me; instead of which he went off, and soon after sailed for America. The paper was to tell the gentleman to put me into some workhouse.

Instead of that, sir, he was as kind to me as if I had been a relation; he never even mentioned the word workhouse to me, and at last sent me to a lady's school at Epsom; and there, sir, through no fault of his, I was miserable. The life was altogether so different. I was looked down upon as not good enough for the young ladies, and I was punished if I spoke to the servants. I couldn't have been a good-dispositioned child, I suppose, or I shouldn't have felt things so hard. Do what I would, all there seemed to go wrong with me. Miss Grant—that was the name of the lady—was a stern, proud woman, and she disliked me. She used often to say, in my hearing too, that taking me was one of the few mistakes she had ever made. She was always pretending to fear that it might do her school harm; then the girls and the servants took their tone from her, so that I don't believe

a more miserable child ever existed than I was there. I got so broken-spirited in one way, and so full of passion and bad spirit in another, that I could not explain to you, sir, what I felt."

"But did this gentleman never take any notice of you—never come to you?" asked Mr. Stanley.

"He came once, that was about a year after I went to Epsom, and so cowed was I that I didn't dare to speak for fear of breaking down before Miss Grant, and when he told me he was going abroad I felt as if I was turned to stone."

"And did he go abroad?"

"I don't know, sir. Miss Grant declared he was so disappointed in me that he never wished to see me again; but I don't believe that now, sir. I believe she poisoned him against me, for he never again took any notice of me."

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“Did you never hear of him again?”

“Never, sir.”

“But you knew his name?”

“Yes, sir; he was called Stapleton; but I could never find out the part of London he lived in. I don’t know that I ever rightly heard the name; but I felt sure I could go to the very spot, and some years after Wig and I went; but though we spent days in trying to find the place out, I never could discover it.”

“How did you meet with your husband at Epsom? Had you known anything of him before?”

“Oh, yes, sir! we’d been brought up children together, and he was with Bill when he went to America, and Wig got on very well in America; but poor Bill, after some years, died there, and then, as soon as he could, Wig came back.”

“To look for you, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir,” put in Wig; “that was the reason. My mind was always made up to marry Nan. I was but eighteen, but, lor’, I thought myself a man, and as soon as I landed in England I set to work to find her; but a year went by and no news, and I was just a beginning to give in, when who should I come across but a little dwarf we’d both know’d, and after a bit she says, ‘Why, somebody was askin’ about you.’ ‘Was they?’ I said. And then she up and told me that, some three or four years afore, she had seen Nan on Epsom Downs, and that she’d grown to be a reg’lar lady, and was put by somebody to school in the village. I was just took on at Duval’s circus at that time—as good a engagement as I could get, sir. We were to go the reg’lar round, and start in three weeks’ time. So off I went, and I soon found out the ladies’ school, and I hung about, till

one evening Nan came out, and I sor her look at me, and then she went on, I follor-ing, for thinks I there's a cut o' Nan about her; and then she turned and had another stare a' times at my hair. I saw 'twas that which took her notice; so I went close up, and I whispers the word 'Wig,' and at that she gave a jump, and she turned and—and——"

"Dear, dear! how wrong of me to let him talk so much!" said Mr. Stanley, for the narration had been too much for poor Wig, and, overcome by past memories and his present weakness, he had burst into tears. Some minutes elapsed before he recovered, and then he murmured something about "the thought that I must leave her, for I know I'm going, Nan." Nan knelt down, talking to him and trying to soothe him, and after a time Mr. Stanley spoke some words of comfort.

“Oh, sir!” answered the poor fellow; “if I couldn’t work ’tis better I should be taken; I should only be a burden to her, and she’s been a good wife; and though I ain’t much, she’s made me a better man than I could ever have been without her. You must think o’ that, Nan, sometimes. Oh, my girl! I oughtn’t never to have taken ye away; I see it now plainer than ever.”

“You mustn’t give me pain by saying so, Wig,” sobbed Nan; “and if ever” (and here she hid her face in his hands) “I’ve been discontented, I’ve been so with our life, Wig, it hasn’t been with you; and I’d work for you willingly, and will do so, if God will but spare you.” She turned towards Mr. Stanley, saying—

“We were so young, sir—only sixteen and eighteen—and we’d nobody to give us a word of advice, and I was as willing to go as he to take me.”

Wig shook his head, and the rector, seeing his agitation, made a sign to Nan to say no more.

"I shall leave you to yourselves now," he said, "because I think he needs some rest; but I will look in again during the afternoon, and then we will have a little more conversation."

Everything necessary for the invalid was daily sent from the rectory, and so good an effect was produced by rest and care, that Nan grew quite confident that Wig might even yet get better again. Since their first conversation Mr. Stanley had talked much with them both, together and separate, and he had learned, without her ever saying so, how distasteful to poor Nan had been the state of life in which, after her marriage, she found herself, and how bitterly she had felt the mistake she had made; for, though she evidently loved her husband, the differ-



ence produced by her superior education had forbidden that companionship which is essential to happiness. Apart from this, too, Nan's mind and character seemed cast in a higher mould, and the more Mr. Stanley saw of her, the more cause he felt he had to rejoice that fate had again thrown her in his way. Wig unconsciously added much to heighten the rector's good opinion of Nan by confiding to him his own shortcomings, thus showing that, while Nan dwelt severely on her own failings, she had never shielded them under her husband's.

"I don't know, sir," said Wig, after one of these conversations, "that I should so much mind not getting well, if I only felt that poor Nan wan't left so all alone; 'tis that disturbs my peace."

After that Mr. Stanley took himself to task whether it was right of him to give way to this whim which had seized him, of

not telling any one who Nan was, and not telling Nan who he was, and he came to the conclusion that if Wig spoke of the matter again he would give him a hint, and then gradually let them both into the secret.

A few days later, as he sat reading after his early dinner, the boy of the inn came running up the path with all speed to say that Mrs. Smith had gone out to get something, and that Mr. Smith was taken with a fit, and would the rector come? Away hurried Mr. Stanley, only to find poor Wig gasping for breath. The woman who had been watching him gave up her place to Mr. Stanley, saying she would run out to see if she could see any signs of Mrs. Smith returning.

"Wig," said Mr. Stanley, "can you hear me speak?" A pressure of the hand gave him answer. "I want you to feel

at rest about Nan. I will take care of her, my poor fellow. I am Mr. Stapleton, her old friend. Nan shall never know want."

When, some few minutes later, Nan returned, poor Wig's struggle with life was over. His hand was still in Mr. Stanley's, who knelt by his side.

"Oh, sir!" she said, after a little time; "to think it should have happened just when I went out! But he begged me so to go, and he said he felt so well."

"It was all in God's mercy," said Mr. Stanley.

"Yes, sir; he looks quite happy," sobbed Nan; "just as he used to when any one had told him something that he knew would please me."

## IV.

AND now we will let a year pass before we take another look at Nan, and so changed shall we find her that it is almost impossible to recognise her—a pardonable offence, for Nan herself often sits pondering upon her past life, saying again and again, “Can this be really I? Am I the same woman who endured all the hardships of precarious life and the misery of constant contact with people whom I shrank from and often dreaded?” She would bring before her the squalid lodgings she had been thankful to live in, rather than encounter the companions that caravan life almost forced upon her, for poor Wig, feeling it impossible to entirely exclude himself from those in whom he saw no great cause of offence, could not resist now and then having what he termed a little

jollification with his friends. At the recollection of these and many another bitter fret, Nan would look round her, sharply and eagerly, as if to be assured by her bodily sense that the present was not a dream from which she would presently awake, to find herself again face to face with her past miseries.

No, there was the quiet little room, plainly but prettily furnished, bearing signs of refinement; there lay her books, here her needlework. From the window she looked out into the steep shady lane, and beyond again to the thicket of trees, their leaves already turned from varying greens to golden reds and browns. A little to the left, the tower of the old church shut from her view the great house, the quiet village street, and the road to the rectory. Not a soul in sight, hardly a sound to be heard, save as the wind sighed softly through the

old walnut-tree near the leaves crackled and fell, for the month is October and the fair but just over. Since the fair began, Nan has not stirred out of doors, fearing she might encounter some one who would revive the memories she is trying to forget—past sorrows, which are known to none in Maryton save herself. Nan's great desire now is to blot out all remembrance that in any way tarnishes poor Wig's kindly nature and early love for herself. Often she sighs regretfully that she did not bear more patiently with her husband, whose temper and disposition she feels were soured and altered by the disease which was robbing him of health and strength, unable to overcome the jealous pain it gave him to see the applause which would have been his carried off by his inferiors in coolness and daring.

Wig had at first sought refuge in the

only distraction he knew of; then, ashamed to appear before Nan stupid and unsteady, he would take another glass to stop his self-reproach, and so, in drowning these feelings, sink into a stupor from which he awakened irritable and aggravated by the contempt and disgust which Nan took no pains to conceal. Each recurrence of this misery widened the breach between the husband and wife, and threw Nan more completely upon herself, until she had made up her mind she would endure such a wretched life no longer. She would hide herself, and, leaving Wig in some way, seek to gain her own living; and while this was brooding in her mind, Wig was struck down by his first attack, and Nan heard that by her care alone, and the evident influence she had over him, could he be kept alive, as, left to himself, the excitement in which he indulged would

speedily terminate his precarious life. Then it was that Nan's good and bad nature had a sharp battle together, which happily ended in her deciding to keep faithful to her marriage vow, so that whatever came she should be found at her husband's side.

The task, undertaken in bitterness and anguish, was soon sweetened by the change which gradually came over Wig, and the efforts Nan made to be a companion to him were rewarded by his not wanting the society of those who had formerly led him astray. Nan had kept all this to herself, and had evaded the questions Mr. Stanley had put, by saying that Wig would have been a better man had he married a different woman. This reticence pleased the rector, it gave him a high opinion of Nan's character; for he knew, by the confessions Wig had made to him, how much she must have



had to suffer and silently endure. Again, he was pleased by her great anxiety to be independent of charity and to gain her own living, although, until the proposition that she should be installed as village schoolmistress was accepted and finally settled, he had no idea how her poor heart had sunk within her at the thought of quitting Maryton, facing a world where she already had learnt bitter experience.

Mr. Stanley never hinted to Nan what a hard battle he had to fight in her favour, for the Maryton folk had little disposition towards keeping in their village a woman who had been connected with the fair people. " 'Twas all very well," they said, "for the rector to talk, but was it likely that any one born and bred to such a life would care about sitting down respectably? Besides, how did they know what her belongings might be—thieves and vagabonds, for aught

any one there could say. But that was the worst of the rector, he fancied everybody as innocent as himself, and was ready to go bail for a man though he should meet him coming down the hulk-side." When at length their consent was given, it was because in their hearts they hoped that something in Mrs. Smith's conduct would afford them speedy opportunity of proving the truth of their objections.

Nan, had, however, been too much accustomed to cold glances for the behaviour of the Maryton people to materially affect her happiness; she took their suspicious scrutiny as a matter of course, and instead of worrying herself about it, did nothing but congratulate herself that the rector was so different. To him she could open her heart, speak without reserve, and put off all restraint. Certainly Mr. Stanley had never before been placed upon such a lofty pedes-

tal as that to which Nan elevated him; and he would often smile at the perfect trust she put in all he said and did. As he gradually became better acquainted with her character, he felt more strongly the injustice that was being dealt out to her, and more determined than ever to stand up for and defend her. "The poor girl has been misjudged and ill treated all her life," he thought, as he reflected on the insight which Nan had given him of her life at Miss Grant's; "having assumed her guardianship, I ought never to have so forsaken and neglected her. Grace showed me that." And the remembrance of his lost love turning his thoughts into a new channel, he gave a sigh over what might have been, "instead of which," he exclaimed regretfully, "I stand alone, without one individual interest in life, my home gloomy, my fireside lonely." And at this point his

reverie was disturbed by his housekeeper knocking at the door to say that Mrs. Smith had come to know if it would be convenient for him to look over the club books.

"Yes, show her in." And as Nan entered he added, "Bring in the tea, Susan, Mrs. Smith may be glad of a cup."

Nan had not put off her mourning gown, but the hideous cap then worn by widows was replaced by a broad-bordered mob, the black ribbons of which contrasted well with her fair hair and shaded her face, which had grown round and plump; a faint pink coloured her cheeks, and her eyes looked bright and clear. Altogether, it was impossible to look at her without confessing that she was a very pretty woman. "Not unlike what my Grace would have been," thought the rector, associating, as was his wont, any beauty with her who remained enshrined

as his standard of perfection. "Ah, poor Nan! your lot as well as mine might have been much lighter had it pleased God that my lost love and I had met earlier in life." Then as Nan looked up from the pile of books she was arranging, he said, "I am not in any great humour for book-making to-night, Mrs. Smith; will you think me a great tyrant if I ask you to come up again about the club, and instead give me now an hour's gossip?"

Nan willingly consented, and soon she was answering questions about past days, straining her memory to put before the rector a picture of her early self, and, all unknown to her, showing him his own youth, until the clock struck nine, and, startled to find it was so late, she said good-bye and hurried home, leaving the rector smiling over what she had said of her early friend Mr. Stapleton.

How strange it was that she should have been thrown a second time in his way, and, but for himself, as friendless and forlorn now as then ! Gazing into the fire, he contrasted the change which time had wrought in him ; then so full of hope and bright anticipations of the future, now with no greater pleasure than to sit and recall the happy past. In all Maryton Nan was the only one linked with those youthful days, on which during the past months Mr. Stanley had been more particularly dwelling. The reason for this was that he had just effected one of his dearest wishes. He had repurchased his old estate of Redlynch. No sooner was this purchase completed than he determined also to resign into the hands of Lady Stanley's brother his living of Maryton, and return to end his days in the house in which he had been born. For some time the Stanley family were the only people

acquainted with this contemplated change, but now, notwithstanding much remonstrance and regret, the matter was settled, and nothing remained but that Redlynch should be put in order for Mr. Stanley's reception. To effect that, it was necessary that the rector should go down there and see what alterations were needed—a task he shrank from for different causes.

Since the time he had resigned Redlynch into other hands, he had neither been there nor to Crickton. Whipping up his resolution, however, one fine June day, he started off from Maryton, and towards evening the London and Dorchester coach set him down at Baddeley, whither a post-chaise carried him on to the Green Dragon at Crickton. But surely not the same Crickton that he had left some thirty years ago! Why, it was more altered than he was himself. Houses had been pulled down, houses built

up; shops had changed owners; fathers and mothers had given place to their sons and daughters.

“Why, there is nobody left!” exclaimed the bewildered rector, as the waiter who served him at supper retailed all he knew of the history and gossip of the place. The next morning his heart almost failed him, fearing that he might find that Redlynch had been also subjected to those, to him, abominable improvements. But he soon saw that his alarm was groundless. Everything remained as when he left. The house was untouched, the garden and paddock unaltered. The three turfy meadows stretched out as shaded and green as when his memory pictured them. The rector breathed again, his spirits revived, and by the time he had peeped into every crevice and cranny of the house and garden, he walked along with a step younger and



brisker than it had been for years. It would have done any one's heart good to see how he examined the hedges, delighted to recognise the old bushes and trees. When he came in sight of the old thorn, he laughed outright to see it as blightedly twisted and defiantly green as when by its side stood the painted caravan with which his last visit was associated.

"I must bring her here and show her the very spot," he said; "and then—yes, I'll tell her all, and we can talk of that old time together." And then of a sudden his face became grave, and he walked thoughtfully back, paying no heed to his surroundings, only communing with himself; and the result was this, that he ordered the house to be made ready with all possible speed, that he returned to Maryton, and the same evening called at Nan's cottage to ask her what she thought about leaving Mary-

ton. And here followed a little indistinctness, but from what Nan could gather he hoped that he had another situation to offer for her acceptance.

“Mind leaving Maryton!” Nan no longer hesitated to say that from the first she had determined not to stay very long after Mr. Stanley; and, though she did not express it in her words, and was most guarded in her manner, yet, when Mr. Stanley took his leave, he felt perfectly assured that as long as she was near him Nan would not care where the place might be nor how hard her situation proved. Some one wanted her as a companion, he said; but as he volunteered nothing more, and as Nan knew that he did not like to be asked questions, she restrained her curiosity, feeling certain that whatever he arranged would be for her happiness and her good.

During the ensuing month Mr. Stanley

was busily occupied. The new rector had to be installed, the rectory vacated, and Redlŷnch made ready, so that he was constantly going between the two places ; and glad enough he was when, the whole business finished, he made his final journey and took formal possession of his home. Nan could scarce restrain her tears when Mr. Stanley came to say good-bye, for although he told her he had settled her departure with the committee, she did not like his going.

“ You must come down soon and see the place,” he said cheerily. “ I have engaged a nice old body as housekeeper, and as I have already named Mrs. Smith to her, she will be quite ready to give you a welcome.” Nan was duly grateful for this invitation, but, not expecting to leave Maryton for some months, she was surprised a few days later to receive a letter from Mr. Stanley, saying

that he had arranged with her probable successor, Miss Collins, to take her duties for a few days from the following Monday, which time he hoped Mrs. Smith would spend at Redlynch. Then came due advice as to the way she was to travel; and, following this out, the next Monday found Nan at Baddeley cross-road, where Mr. Stanley was waiting to drive her to Redlynch. He was looking so radiant and happy that Nan could not help remarking on his improved appearance.

“Do I look any younger, Nan?” he said, laughing.

“Indeed yes;” and Nan laughed and blushed too, for Mr. Stanley had called her by her Christian name, and for once in her life her despised name sounded sweetly in her ears.

“That is right,” he said, looking at her. “I want to grow young, for, to let you

into a secret, Nan, I am hoping to get married."

Nan's face had grown quite white before she could get out that faint little "Yes, sir;" but Mr. Stanley was too much engrossed in his coming happiness to notice her distress; for though she felt her agitation must be visible, he only laughingly repeated—

"Yes, if I can but obtain the lady's consent, I hope to get married. Now what should you say? Let me see; she's about your age. Do you think any one of your age, Nan, would accept an old fellow like me?"

Nan felt absolutely cross. Why should Mr. Stanley select her to put these questions to? In order to keep her temper in proper check, she had to assume a very measured tone as she said—

"If people care for each other, I do not

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see what the age of either of them has to do with it."

"Oh, that is very cheering, Nan; I shall certainly act on your advice then." And, cracking his whip, he set off the horse at a quicker pace, chuckling aloud and repeating, "Remember you're responsible, Nan, you're responsible."

In spite of the gloom which had thus suddenly been cast over her, Nan could not help noticing the lovely lanes and hedges by which they were driving. Everything was so still and calm, that it seemed impossible to refuse to submit to the peaceful influence. A few unobserved tears relieved her swelling heart; and when Mr. Stanley broke a rather lengthened silence by saying, "This is Redlynch," Nan's smiles came like the sun on an April day. She turned towards Mr. Stanley, intending to speak, but somehow the words never came, and she

entered the house, hardly daring to ask herself had she heard aright, for something like "Welcome to your home!" was ringing in her ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It is not too late for a stroll, Nan?" Mr. Stanley asked, after she had been duly refreshed by the substantial tea provided in her honour. "You do not feel very tired, do you?"

Nan's answer was to fetch her hood, and side by side the two set off.

It was a lovely evening, clear and soft, mellowed, not darkened, by the grey shadows slowly spreading out, as they turned at the gate to get a good look of the old house. Nan thought she had never before been so touched by the beauty of trees and fields. "I do not wonder that you wanted to come back," she said; "it is a place I have seen in a dream. I

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could almost fancy I knew my way across those meadows."

"That is where I am going to take you, and as we go I want to tell you a story which happened to me nearly thirty years ago. Will you listen to it, Nan? Come, then, let us cross the stile, and then begin." And he carefully and graphically related the adventure by which he became first acquainted with little Nan and her step-father, Bill.

It was evident that for some little time Nan did not recognise the history. Suddenly her memory seemed awakened, and by the time Mr. Stanley related the part in which he gave her the paper with his London address, trembling and pale with excitement, she had recognised both herself and him.

"And you have known me for the same all this time?" she sobbed.



“I had not been with you ten minutes before a suspicion of the truth flashed across me.”

Poor Nan! She tried to speak, but the various emotions she had undergone during the day seemed to culminate in this crowning surprise. The trees ran suddenly round, the hedges closed in upon her, the ground gave way, and, before Mr. Stanley could catch her, she sank fainting on the grass.

Fortunately there was no one near to witness the scene, and before Mr. Stanley had time to get alarmed Nan opened her eyes; and then in a little while she had to shut them again, and listen in silence to the rest of the history Mr. Stanley had to tell. When, at length, she tried to speak, Mr. Stanley would not allow a word to be uttered.

“I don’t want you to talk, Nan,” he said,  
“I only want you to listen; and, when you

have strength enough, let me take you to yonder thorn, so that I may say what remains to be said on the very spot where I first saw little Nan. Ah! your face is still as earnest and tender as it was then. I never look at it without getting a glimpse at my youth."

Nan had by this time risen, and was slowly walking to the opposite side of the meadow.

"Here," said Mr. Stanley, "is the very spot where you and I first met. Thirty years have gone by since then—years which have severed us and brought us together again, altered us, and yet not snapped the sympathy which from the first seemed to draw us to one another. Until the other day, when I came here, I did not realise how I associated you with my old home—how, while thinking of it, I thought of you; and casting this over in my mind, I made

resolution. I said, 'Perhaps, if I brought Nan here and told her the whole story—who knows but she might give me my reward?'

"She would, had she a reward in her power to bestow," Nan murmured faintly.

After a pause of a few moments, then taking her hand, Mr. Stanley said, "Nan, will you be my wife?"

Ah, happy Nan! Amid her joy, how was she to find voice to say "Yes"? Surely, there was no need to make further answer than the one written in her face, as she turned, radiant and happy, towards Mr. Stanley. Certain it was, he needed nothing more; for, tightening his clasp of her hand, he said, "God bless you, Nan!" And as Nan in her heart echoed the blessing, she humbly asked to devote to him the life he had made thus happy.

The dews were falling thick and heavy as

the two sober lovers retraced their steps back to Redlynch. At the porch Nan made a pause, and, after a moment's hesitation, she said somewhat abruptly, "I want you to tell me—it is—not only kindness which makes you wish this?"

"Is it only gratitude which makes you say yes?"

Nan shook her head. "Ah," she said, "I need never tell you how little gratitude I have in my nature."

"Well, then, Nan, what is it?"

"Because I love you with all the heart I have."

"Then, Nan, we are very fortunate, for if I had all the world to choose from——"

"Which you have."

"Well, then, give me your hand, for my choice still falls on little Nan."

## LA BONNE MÈRE NANNETTE.

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ONE of the "red-letter days" of our tour through Normandy was that on which, according to the good advice of the man who drove us from Caen, we decided to stop for a day at Vire, instead of at once taking the train to Granville. Accordingly, we and our luggage were deposited at the Hôtel St. Pierre, the entrance to which, as is common in these old-fashioned towns, was through the kitchen. At its door stood our hostess, waiting to receive us, not only as travellers and customers, but to give us that hearty greeting which so smacks of welcome, and at once makes one feel at home.

Between our driver and ourselves a tho-

rough friendship had sprung up, and this he conveyed in his manner, as he presented the Monsieur et Mesdames Anglais to La Bonne Mère Nannette, as she stood there in a short, full, brown petticoat, a striped red kerchief crossed on her bosom, and a high net cap, lined with blue, the perfect type of a handsome Norman countrywoman, aged, seemingly, between fifty and sixty.

“Go, my child,” she said to a pretty fair girl who stood a little behind her, eyeing us with curiosity, “go, and show to madam the chambers which we have;” and, following our young guide, we were conducted through two or three rooms, with comfortable, clean-looking beds, and handsomely carved wooden presses; and, having made our choice, we descended to the salon to partake of the table d’hôte dinner, which was just being served. The result of all this was, that instead of leaving (as had

been our intention) for Granville the next day, that day week found us still at Vire ; the rest of the party exploring the valley, while I, seated on the bench in front of the hotel, with Mère Nannette by my side, asked her to tell me the story of her life, which, from various things we had heard in the town, I knew must be one I should like to listen to.

Madame will not think me vain, she said, turning her still lovely dark eyes towards me, when I tell her that some forty years ago the travellers and the customers who came here daily to breakfast or dinner called me La Belle Nannette. My cousin, whose husband was master of the hotel, would often bid me not to pay heed to their flattering speeches, which meant no good to a poor orphan girl, who thought her fortune was made when food

and shelter were offered to her in exchange for the services she rendered in doing the work and being servant at the Hôtel St. Pierre.

Jeanne Ferouelle, good woman as she was, might have spared Nannette all these cautions, for the child had been made deaf to the pleasant words other men might say, since Raoul Vanier, the blacksmith's young son, had whispered into her willing ear his tale of love.

Ah, madame! where can I tell you to look for a man who shall show to you what Raoul was at the time of which I speak? He was tall, broad, and handsome, with head up, and limbs made nobler each day by wielding the great hammer, the sound of which I loved far more than the sweetest music. There was but one drawback to our happiness. Marcel Vanier was a rich man, with money saved up, and a



trade as good as any smith's in Calvados, and he looked that his son should choose higher than Nannette, a poor serving-maid. But for a time he seemed to close his eyes to the love-making which could hardly escape his notice, for the forge stood as madame sees it now ; and where the roses bloom, of which your country thinks so much, there used Raoul to stand and give a whistle, which some good angel seemed always to carry to Nannette's ears, and she would run to the window, to kiss her hand, and read some sign, which told her where he was going, or how and where they could meet.

Marcel Vanier, it seems, took vexed heed of all this, but being a cunning man at heart, he thought such young love, if unopposed, would surely fade out and die. But when month after month went by, and still the only one whom Raoul strolled with

to the castle, and lingered whispering with beneath the shadow of the old trees, continued to be Nannette, Marcel felt the time was come to put a stop to this foolishness. At this time one of the best-thought-of men in Vire was Paschal Cloutier, the wool-dyer, whose only child, Eulalie, was counted a beauty in Vire, added to which her father boasted he could give her a better *dot* than any man in the town could match. It was on this girl Marcel Vanier cast his eyes, and, after a few talks between the two fathers, the whole matter was in their minds settled, and neither of the parents troubled himself as to what his child might have to say. With Eulalie there was little fear of opposition, for Paschal Cloutier's will was law in his household; besides which Raoul was comely enough to win any woman's heart, and was already the envy and admiration of all the girls round, although they

said it was of no use looking at a man who only saw one woman.

Marcel Vanier decided that he would speak first on this matter to his son, who should then pay a visit to the Cloutiers, and see Eulalie at home; after which, Paschal said, he would inform his daughter that in Raoul Vanier she saw the man he had chosen for his son-in-law, an honour he ranked far before his being Eulalie's husband. Accordingly, a few days after, Marcel told his son that he desired they should have a little treat together.

"Let it be a walk to René Sage's," he said; "and, to sustain us, what sayest thou to dining at the Hôtel St. Pierre?"

Raoul, well pleased, gave his consent, and at the hour, to Nannette's great surprise, the two of them walked into the kitchen.

"Madame Ferouelle has a good dinner to-day, I hope, Nannette," said Marcel

Vanier, more pleasant and cheerful than was his wont.

“Oh, yes, m’sieu !” answered Nannette, not knowing quite how she had best behave herself towards one whose good-will she so desired to obtain.

“That is well. Set two places, for myself and my son.”

“Yes, certainly, m’sieu ;” and away ran Nannette to secure the best places she had vacant, to put on her red apron, and make her hair look quite smooth under her cotton cap ; for a lace one such as I wear now was then far beyond her poor means.

Madame may be sure, whoever might be neglected, Marcel Vanier was well served. Nannette scarcely dared venture a glance at Raoul, who, well pleased at the attention his father was getting, sat with a contented look on his handsome face, listening to the news which the commercial travellers, the

great talkers at all country tables, were obligingly giving to the company. Little did it matter to Nannette whether Charles X. would be forced into exile or not; the thing was, should she be able to secure for Monsieur Vanier plenty of stuffing with his helping of the veal. The chances as to the Duke of Orleans being made King of the French was very secondary to her, while she had to manage that Raoul's father got the best share of andouilles. Her attentions at last seemed to force an acknowledgment from Monsieur Vanier himself, for he looked back at her, and said—

“Mademoiselle Nannette, you are a treasure. I must come and dine here again.” And his speech pleased the young girl more than if the grand folks of whom they were talking had praised her.

While his father had a word with

Madame Ferouelle, Raoul contrived to whisper to Nannette to meet him that evening ; and then, with a light heart, she watched the two down the hill, and along the road which leads to Jurque.

Nannette could only steal a little time for these meetings with Raoul, on account of which she got many a scolding from her cousin ; so, as was her custom, no sooner had she stolen out of the house, than she began running as fast as she could through the porte, past the church, and up the steep bit which leads to the back of the castle. There was no moon, so she could not see Raoul's face. He was already there and waiting ; but the moment he spoke, Nannette's heart sank, and she asked with trembling voice what had gone wrong. For a little minute Raoul tried to deceive her, and then he told all their trouble, and why his father had asked him to walk that

evening. I need not repeat to madame all the poor young things said to each other, the vows of constancy which Raoul made, the hatred he professed for Eulalie, whose fair beauty he denied, and whom he compared to a white mouse or a yellow rabbit. Nannette smiled when he begged her to keep true to him. Ah! she had no cause to be otherwise; it was Raoul who must be firm; and when he vowed that nothing should change his heart, Nannette believed him as she believed herself.

After they had parted, the poor child turned towards home with a heavy heart. She stopped by the gateway over which stands our Lady, and tried to ask her help; but the lantern's light showed the blessed Mother's face happy and radiant with joy, and Nannette felt that perhaps she might never be happy again, for Marcel Vanier was a stern man, and he had sworn an oath

that Raoul should never marry Nannette. She stood for a moment—"was there time?" The clock had just struck nine, and already she was sure to get a scolding. Well, better be scolded, and beaten too, than lose His help to whom her heart said "go;" and, with no more tarrying steps, she nearly flew to the Rue St. Croix, where still stands the blessed crucifix, which, in memory of the good bishop, Monsieur le Curé had then recently put up. Kneeling there was the widow Leroux, whose husband had been buried that very day, and old Gautier Perrine, whose only daughter lay sick of fever; and Nannette, with an untried heart, that thought no burden could be sorer than that laid now upon it, took her place between these two mourners; and when she rose, she felt strengthened with a hope that all would go well with her.

Jeanne Ferouelle was a little harsh that



night—her temper had been tried; and because Nannette took her reproaches without a word, she called her obstinate and stubborn as a mule.

Now, Marcel Vanier was greatly perplexed how to act for the best. Raoul absolutely refused to go to the Cloutiers' house, or to say anything to Eulalie which might be twisted into love-making. Without doubt, if this were told to Paschal Cloutier, he would resent it, and refuse the addresses which Marcel determined sooner or later his son should make. After work-time he strolled down to the bridge, where he knew he should find Paschal, and told him that as he had a large order for horse-shoes, which must be ready before the 15th, he should say nothing about Eulalie to Raoul just then, for fear it would take all his thoughts off his work. Paschal nodded his assent, although he did not give

entire credit to his neighbour's excuses ; for he was not so ignorant of Raoul's attentions to Nannette as Marcel supposed.

So day by day Raoul and his father fought wordy battles, which grew more and more bitter and hard, until Marcel went to Jeanne Ferouelle, and told her all his grievance, and got her to promise that she would keep a strict watch on Nannette, and so prevent her meeting Raoul. For a time this surveillance succeeded ; but one morning, on account of a word which the old soldier Brisac brought to her, Nannette was up by break of day, and stealing down into the yard, she found Raoul waiting there, looking desperate, with a little bundle in his hand, as if for going away.

"Yes," he said, "Nannette, I have come to say adieu. I cannot live under the roof of my father, eat his bread, and listen to the words he speaks of thee and me. He

will give me no proper wages ; he calls me at best an idle dog, who will never earn enough to fill my own mouth. So I leave him, Nannette ; and more, I leave thee, my well-beloved, but only to gain enough to call thee mine in face of all the world. Brisac tells me that in England and America they value smiths more than any trade going, and pay them as much in a month as in Caen or Rennes one would get in a year ; so I shall go to Granville, and find some ship to take me ; and, in a year, thou wilt be mine, Nannette."

Nannette did not speak ; she felt as one with senses stunned.

Raoul read this in her white face, and the quick tears for the sorrow he was causing her filled his eyes, and made him give a sob of pain, which loosened Nannette's tongue.

“Will nothing do,” she groaned, “but that thou must go from me?”

“It is best, Nannette; indeed it is,” said poor Raoul, down whose cheeks the tears were rolling. “If I stay, I know not what may happen. Each day my father grows more violent. In his rage he threatens to do things of which thou couldst never dream; he makes vows, takes oaths, until I think the devil himself must have got into his skin and be speaking to me. Be brave, Nannette, for my sake. Remember it is my love for thee which gives me courage for this step. See, I can of my own will give thee up for a whole year, that I may then come back and claim my wife. I would rather never see thy face again, than be compelled to give my faith to Eulalie;” and then his face growing anxious, and seeing that it was time that he left her, he prayed Nannette to be

constant, and, come what might, never to listen to the love of any other man, nor ever to believe aught ill of him, who, while his life was left, would live for her alone; and Nannette, with all the solemnness of faith and love, gave him the vow he asked of her.

When it was discovered that, without a word of what he meant to do, or where he meant to go, Raoul had left his home, Marcel Vanier, though furious at heart, feigned to say that he was well rid of the young rascal, though "'twould not be long before he was back again, cap in hand, begging for forgiveness." And he added that "he would kill the fatted calf for the wedding feast."

The reason for all this was, that he felt sure that Raoul had gone to a good customer of theirs at Rennes; and thither, thinking he should find him employed in

the smithy, Marcel pretended he was forced to go; but when he was told that his son had neither been seen nor heard of, he set off for Mortain, and, his anxiety increasing, he even went to Caen, at all of which places he supplied nails and horseshoes, but no tidings could he get. Then his hard heart melted within him like wax, until at last he was fain to come to Nannette, and, asking to see her alone, he implored her, if she knew anything about his boy, to tell him.

All that Nannette had to tell she told; and the very next day the diligence took Marcel to Granville, where, after much search, he learnt that some weeks before Raoul had left for Canada on board a vessel called the *Angelique*, the captain of which was cousin to old Brisac. Persons whom he met at Granville said Raoul had found a good chance, for the talk was that out there they would pay high wages to any

good workman, and the captain had given him leave to work out his passage.

So there was nothing for it but that Marcel Vanter should return to Vire, and make out of his son's departure the best story he could. He pretended that he thought it no such bad thing for a young fellow to see a little of the world. It would take the fool out of him, he said, and when he came back "he'd have learned to know wine from cider." But for all this talk his stern face looked harder, his voice was sharper, and he turned aside from Nannette as if she had the plague. People began to wonder why it was, that, evening after evening, he was always to be met walking down the valley towards the house of Monsieur Fourcher, who was then agent to the paper-mills there; and at last it came to be whispered abroad, that Monsieur Fourcher could put people in the way of

making a fortune so easily, that you had but to give your money to some one in Paris, whom he would tell you of, and it was doubled and trebled in no time.

Some were all for wishing that they had money to give him, but the old ones shook their heads, and said no good ever came of new ways, and only fools trusted money out of sight and reach; still they did not say this to Marcel Vanier, but treated him with great courtesy and respect, for when a man begins to grow rich no one knows to what grandeur he may attain.

Nannette often sighed over these reports of Marcel's growing riches, for in them she only saw a fresh barrier between her and Raoul. Poor child! it seemed to her that this year of Raoul's absence would never come to an end; and she turned impatiently away from the old gossips and mothers, who croaked and shook their heads, to the young



girls, who were as full of life and vigour as herself, and who believed no clouds could overshadow their future, or prevent the fulfilment of their wishes.

Of course she knew that Raoul might be delayed a week, a month, or even two months; but after that—oh, she felt certain he would come. So she gave back saucy answers to the speeches of the men whom she met in the town. She laughed at the farmers, who, while their carts waited to pass the octroi, would come in for cider, and who would tell her that her eyes were darker than the plums upon the walls, and her cheeks rosier than the apples which hung in their orchards, slyly sighing, or openly saying the cottage that stood in the midst of all this had no mistress, and the chair at the table's head was waiting for one. Jeanne Ferouelle was vexed at times because so much notice was taken of her young

cousin. Nannette was too good a worker to lose, and she would say sharply, that she would not have them fill the girl's head with such idle gossip.

Well, madame, at last the weary year came to an end. The great fête was over, and the day on which Raoul should have returned to Vire past a month since. People thought little of learning in those days; so that, though Raoul was able to write, he did not send any letters, knowing that neither Nannette nor his father could read them; and we country folk being accustomed to this silence, it did not trouble or alarm us. Just before Christmas, Marcel Vanier went to Granville, but no tidings could he learn of the *Angelique*, neither had Jean Brisac been able to get any intelligence of his cousin the captain; and so two or three years passed slowly away, and still no word of Raoul. Reports would come

occasionally that some one had seen some one else, who had seen a sailor at Granville, who knew Raoul Vanier, and who said he was at ———, and was getting on famously. At another time it would be hinted that neither the *Angelique* nor any one on board her, would ever be heard of again, as a vessel answering to her in every way had foundered at sea, and gone down with every soul in her.

Happily Nannette paid no heed to any of this talk. Hope in a young girl's breast is so strong that it seems impossible to crush it. At intervals great bursts of passionate sorrow would seem to break over her, and overwhelm her with despair. Could it be that she was alone in the world, with no one to love, no one to cling to? The bare idea seemed too terrible to make its realisation for more than an instant possible. No, no —God would be good to her—would send

him back yet. Why, a thousand things might be keeping him ; and then cheating herself by picturing the happiness which was most surely in store, the poor child, for such at heart she was, would forget her misery and turn her tears into smiles.

In the autumn of the fourth year real tidings did come of Raoul, through the captain of the *Angelique*, whom Marcel Vanier travelled all the way to Havre to see. From him Marcel heard that he left Raoul at Quebec, that he was doing well, and could have got work in the dockyard there, but he had had a better offer further in the interior, and he started for that part the same day the *Angelique* left for the port to which she was bound. The captain had quite expected to find him at home again ; for he laughed at Raoul, as having made but a sad sailor. Before they were half across the great ocean, he said, the poor

boy was filling the sea with tears of sorrow, and heaving sighs fit to fill the sails of the ship which was carrying him far away from all he loved. He comforted Marcel by telling him that he was sure his son was all safe, but doubtless he had grown wise enough to stay and make his fortune, which he was certain to do there. He would be going out again in the autumn, and then he would take all the letters and messages which Marcel liked to send; and when in September the *Angelique* sailed, she carried, besides what Marcel sent, a letter from Nannette begging Raoul to return home at once. Nannette could not write the letter, neither could she read it when written, but until it went she carried it next her heart, and seized every spare moment to cover it with kisses, feeling certain that Raoul would do the same, and would not delay his return a moment after

reading the tender entreaties that she had made Mère Leroux fill it with.

For months after the vessel sailed Marcel Vanier's good spirits seemed to rise. Everybody talked of the money he was making. 'Twas plain, they said, that Cloutier did all the courting now, and he had made Eulalie refuse several young men, hoping he might yet secure Raoul as a husband for her.

Marcel Vanier now came nearly every day to breakfast and dinner at the hotel, that he might get into talk with the travellers who knew Paris, and could tell him of the banks, and the funds, and the bourse, about all of which he seemed to understand as much as they did. Sometimes Monsieur Fourcher would accompany him, and his presence was always welcome, for he was very merry and ready with his joke and laugh; and everybody was sorry to

hear one day that he had been offered a better post near to Paris, and that he was going to leave Vire almost immediately. Nannette had of late become a much more important personage than in former days; for her cousin, Jeanne Ferouelle, lost her husband of a fever, which, notwithstanding that he had been dying of asthma for twenty years, carried him off in a week. Madame Ferouelle caught the complaint, and Nannette, she found, had helped her through her illness, and kept all going straight downstairs.

Jeanne's good heart never forgot it, and she told Nannette that if Raoul came home and claimed her now he should wed no portionless bride. But another year came to a close, and no news of Raoul. Often when Madame Ferouelle was pressing on Nannette the suit of some persevering lover (and as her prospects brightened

her admirers became more numerous), she would hint at the increasing certainty that something must have happened to Raoul, and the probability that in this world he would never be seen again, but Nannette never faltered or gave way. If he was living, she said, though it were fifty years, he would come back, and if he were dead, she would go to him faithful to the vow which made her his for ever.

Marcel Vanier had been much more friendly spoken of late. Something seemed to draw him towards Nannette. Eulalie Cloutier was at last tired of waiting, and had married Jacques Onfroï, the tanner of Mortain; and as much as he could without actually saying so, Marcel showed Nannette that he would put no further obstacle in the way of his son's wishes. He paid very little attention to his forge now, and left most of



the work to be done by the men whom he employed.

One morning there was a great stir in the place. Marcel Vanier had had a letter, and while it was being read he had fallen down in a fit, from which he could not be recovered. Soon at least a dozen stories found their way to the Hôtel St. Pierre. The letter, it was said, was about Raoul; that he had returned, that he was dead, shipwrecked, drowned—words that now froze Nannette's heart, and now turned her blood to fire.

"I must learn the truth," she said; "he will tell me; I have a right to know." And without listening to more, she ran to Marcel Vanier's house, where the doctor was by this time come, and the sick-room was emptied of all intruders. Monsieur Levasseur, however, heard Nanette's voice, and, knowing a good deal of her and her

story, he called to her to step inside. There lay Marcel like one dead, and bending over him stood his old housekeeper, Celestine, too frightened to pay any attention to the directions Monsieur Levasseur was giving or had given her. The room faded away before Nannette's gaze, and a cold sweat broke out over her, and her senses seemed dying away with the certainty that her worst fears about Raoul were more surely confirmed. The good doctor saw the girl's blanched face, and, guessing the cause, he said, "Nannette, my child, take courage, it is his money he has lost." And oh, madame! at those blessed words what wonder that Nannette fell upon her knees, and thanked God for his goodness to her?

"Poor man!" said Monsieur Levasseur; "it is a sad blow for him; he was so confident of that Fourcher, whom I always mistrusted. The whole concern, it seems,

was a fraud, and' one for which many an honest fellow besides poor Vanier will suffer—that is, if he lives to realise his loss, which just now is doubtful.” But, to make my story short, he did recover, madame, although for many weeks Nannette expected each breath he drew would be his last. She watched him and tended him in every spare minute of her time, as if he had already been that which she hoped to call him—her father. And he well repaid her care, for never was love more devoted than that he now heaped upon the once despised Nannette. She managed everything for him—got Mère Leroux for a small sum to take him to live with her, sold his business for him, and went day by day to see that he wanted nothing. His strength had now all gone, and one arm and one leg hung quite helpless. Many neighbours shook their heads, and called his heavy affliction a

judgment, and said 'twas well for him that Nannette could forgive all the misery his pride had brought upon himself and all belonging to him. But, madame, believe me, the girl was happier than she had been since Raoul left her. She had some one now on whom she could shower the love which oppressed her heart. Marcel had to be humoured, petted, and caressed like a child. From being a strong, stern man, he would cry, and scold Nannette if she forgot to bring him his little packet of snuff. Fortunately about this time Jeanne Ferouelle began to pay Nannette wages, so that out of her four hundred francs a year she was able, when Marcel's little money came to an end, to pay for his board and lodging. All this time no tidings came of Raoul, and the only news which reached Vire was that the *Angelique* had been wrecked and lost on her way back from Quebec; so that the last

hope was gone, and it came to be looked upon as a settled thing that Raoul was dead ; that for love of him Nannette had even said "No," to M. Leroi, the government cloth-buyer, that she would never marry, and therefore nobody need ever again ask her ; and upon this knowledge, to her great relief, after a time, they acted, treating her much as she wanted them to do, and regarding her as a widow.

She and old Marcel never talked of what was now going on in the town. All their conversation ran on the days which were past, when Raoul was a boy ; how handsome and strong he grew up, what he used to say, where he went, what he did, and so on. On fête days, when the couples went by to some merry-making, they would cast pitiful glances upon Nannette, as she sat knitting by the side of old Marcel, who, in his wheel chair, had been pushed by her

into the sun or up to the forge. But she was happy; and knowing that God loves not to see us with sour discontent in our hearts or our faces, she was even merry and cheerful.

“Ah, Nannette!” Marcel would sometimes say, with a sigh; “dost thou still mourn my boy? If some miracle were to send him back to us, and I could see thee and him one, I would ask no more, no more; but my eyes will never again behold him. It is just that I who drove him from his home, and killed him, should suffer!” and then he would fall to weeping, and Nannette had to comfort him as best she could, though not by saying that Raoul would yet return, for that she felt could never be.

It was now more than eighteen years since Raoul Vanier left Vire, and but once in all this time had news been heard about him.

It was spring-time, and the Hôtel St. Pierre was being cleaned and smartened up for the summer visitors, who had of late taken to stop and drive up the valley, and paint pictures of Porte Horloge and the castle. Nannette was as busy as the birds, and up almost as early. She had just set the salon in order when Treboul, the post-man, looked in at one of the windows, and said—

“Good day, m’mselle Nannette; I expect I have some news for you in my leathern bag—a letter for Monsieur Vanier.”

“A letter!” gasped Nannette.

“Yes, perhaps to tell him his money has all come back again.”

“Oh, yes!” said Nannette, who had for a moment forgotten about the money; “about what else could it be? Assuredly nothing.” Still Nannette took the very first opportunity to run to the cottage and

see Marcel had got his letter, which he was keeping for Nannette. He had not opened it, because he could not read it; but he said he felt certain it was about his money, because it looked exactly like the last he had, and very anxious he was to have an end put to his hopes and fears. So Nannette undertook to carry it to the schoolroom, where she felt certain that one of the good brothers would tell them what it was about. Frère Dominique was walking up and down the green outside, and he willingly acceded to Nannette's request. She handed the letter to him, and he read it through, and then said—

“It is from Marcel's son, Raoul Vanier. He lies at Granville at the point of death, and implores his father will go to him at once. See, it is but a dozen words.”

But Nannette's whole life seemed gone, and she fell down on the ground like a



stone. When she came to herself, a crowd had gathered round her, and every one was talking of the wonderful news that Raoul Vanier was alive, and was at Granville, from which place some one had written to say he was ill, and his father must not delay going to see him.

What was to be done? Who should go? Marcel, it was certain, could not move.

"I shall go," said Nannette, as soon as she could speak, "and stay until he is well enough to bring home."

As gently as possible she broke this sad news to Marcel, and then she went off to Jeanne Ferouelle, told her that she must leave her for a few days, but that she would return as quickly as possible. She made her few arrangements, thanked Jeanne for the money the good woman made her take with her; and then, because there was no diligence until the next Tuesday, set off in

a country cart returning to Poutbert, whence she hoped to fall in with some other conveyance which would take her to or near Granville. People said how quietly she took it all, because she could not talk or think of anything but how soon she should reach Granville.

From Poutbert a farmer gave her a seat in his cart for some miles. After that she walked, and the next morning's sun was well up before she found herself entering the town, foot-sore and weary, but pressing on to the direction given in the letter, which was to go to the quay and inquire for Agar Cagot's. This she did, and a dingy-looking house was pointed out to her, about whose door were clustered a number of sailors, and above their heads she read in large, black painted letters, "*Ici on fait la chaudière.*"

"Madame Cagot?" she asked, addressing one of the men.

“Yes, madame.” And he made way for her to pass into the house, where a smell was as if all the bouilli in the place was being boiled. It was now that Nannette’s courage seemed coming to an end. Her head swam, her heart beat, her knees knocked together. She could hardly find voice enough to say to the woman who came forward—

“I believe, madame, you have some one lodging here named Raoul Vanier?”

“Certainly we have. Are you his sister, madame? I am truly glad you are here, for he is very ill, and the doctor says he can do nothing for him. But you will wish to see him.” And she turned, and went through into a passage, and up a low flight of creaking stairs, at the top of which poor Nannette was forced to stop. “Oh!” thought she, “surely he will be spared. He can never have come back only to die.”

The woman, who had stepped inside the room, now reappeared, and made a sign to Nannette to come in.

"He still sleeps," she whispered, as she stood on one side to let her pass; and in another moment Nannette was again face to face with him whose love she had cherished through all these long dreary years. Yes, it was indeed Raoul, pinched and haggard, but still the dear face her eyes had so hungered to see. Falling on her knees, she blessed God for letting them meet once again. "He *will* get better," she thought. "I will so tend and watch him, that he must recover, and if he is not strong I can work for both;" and her eyes looked with pride on her big hands, tanned with toil and labour.

"You'd best have something to eat," said Madame Cagot. "He won't wake up for hours yet from the doctor's draught, and

when he does he'll want all your time; for he needs a deal of waiting upon. Come down with me," she urged, seeing Nannette hesitate. "I'll take you into my little salon, and there we can have a chat together. You will like to hear what the doctor says." And she let her into a sort of closet boarded off from the large cooking room. "There, take that. I see you are upset by seeing him so ill; but it's a mercy you have found him alive. He had a terrible attack yesterday. I should never have consented to having him if I'd known how ill he was; but my son is on board the *Jean Marie*—that's the vessel he came in. 'Twas his father, I think, he expected to see."

"Yes," replied Nannette; "but his father is helpless, and not able to move."

"Ah, well, it is better that you are here. A woman is best in sickness, and he wants so much waiting upon. I don't know what

I should have done if my niece had not offered to take the children; they are so fretful all among strangers. Perhaps they'll be better with you, though you're a stranger to them, too."

"What?" exclaimed Nannette sharply.

"Didn't he tell you of all his troubles in his letter?"

Nannette shook her head. "I know nothing," she managed to say.

Madame Cagot's face brightened at the thought of getting the first chance of imparting melancholy news.

"And you do not know then that his poor wife is dead? Ah, yes! three weeks after they had left land, sickness for home and sickness of the sea killed her, and she had to be thrown overboard. Ah, what a terrible fate!" And Madame Cagot stared hard into Nannette's grey, stony face.

“I must get out into the air, madame,” Nannette said, jumping up.

“But why?” exclaimed Madame Cagot, frightened at her new guest’s fixed look. “Had you not best lie down, and be quiet a little?”

“No, no; this trouble is so sudden; I shall be better outside.” And not waiting for more argument, she rushed out, and ran along past the few houses on the quay, hoping she should find some place where, unseen, she could realise this newly-found agony. There was no one in sight among the rocks—the tide had left them black and bare, and down among them sank poor Nannette, with a thousand wild thoughts surging through her bewildered brain.

Should she go back to Vire without looking again on the face of him who had proved so cruelly false? Should she go

far away from all who knew her and about her? How should she act?

“Oh, my God!” she cried. “Thou who knowest my misery, show me what to do; leave me not now that I am indeed forsaken of all others!” And then she laid her poor burning head on the wet sea-weed, and thought of all she had hoped, all she had feared. Many terrible things had often occurred to her, but never aught like this. She would have staked her life against Raoul’s love for her. Never had a day passed without her prayers being offered up for him; for his sake she had let her youth pass, her beauty fade, and all that women hold dear go by; and was this to be her reward, to find herself forsaken? Oh, that she had never known the truth! Better far that she could have gone down to the grave with her faith and trust unbroken.



“I rejoice,” she cried out fiercely, “that he has heavy trials, that he suffers horrible pain! I am glad that he will die! I would not hold out my finger to——” And here God had pity, and ‘her good angel touched her poor stony heart, and in a moment the tears were raining from her eyes, and she was imploring that his life might be spared. Willingly for it did she offer her own; “for,” said she, “his children need him, but no one now needs me.”

At length her sobs subsided, and she lay soothed by the wonderful murmur of the sea; and as she lay she thought of all her life past, and of him who had seemed to be her source of joy and comfort; and after a long time she rose, saying that she would go back to the house and see Raoul, and there should be peace between them.

So she went back, and, Madame Cagot not being in the way, she went up into the room where Raoul still lay sleeping. She took a chair, and sat looking at his poor thin face, until her whole nature was so filled with pity, that she forgot all else but sad grief that they must let him go, for there was no mistaking that the seal of death was upon his face. She had sat some time before the door was pushed a little open, and a pale-faced child, looking nine or ten years old, put in its little head, and then stood staring silently at Nannette, who, feeling sure who she was, beckoned her forward.

"I am your papa's sister," she whispered. "Thou must love me, my child." And the little one held up its face, and let Nannette fold her in her arms.

"Babette is down-stairs," said the child. "Wilt thou fetch her too? She cannot

walk up-stairs, and she will cry without me.”

So Nannette went to the top of the staircase, and Madame Cagot gave into her arms the little one, Babette, who soon went to sleep, while Marie, sitting at Nannette's feet, amused herself quietly, as children accustomed to sickness and suffering can. Therefore it happened that when Raoul Vanier opened his eyes they rested upon Nannette, with his two children nestled close beside her. He knew her in a moment—indeed, he called her little changed. But he could not do much else than hold her hand in his, and call down blessings on her head. 'Twas Nannette's tears that flowed. Raoul was too weak to show much outward emotion. He listened to her tale of his father's loss and illness, and how he and all his friends had thought he must be dead. He never spoke while she

told her story, as simply as she could, for fear of agitating him, only every now and then from between his closed eyes would roll down big tears. During the day he said no word of his marriage, his life, or why he had never written. Only, as Nannette attended to his wants, he would call her an angel, and press his poor lips on her hand; though by that time, madame, with the tender love a mother has towards her helpless babe, Nannette longed to take him in her arms, and fold him to her heart.

Towards evening he seemed to grow stronger, and they two being alone, he called her to him, and told her that he well knew his days, perhaps his hours, were numbered, as the doctor had told him that he could not live through another outburst of bleeding (for it was of a consumption he was dying), and he wanted to tell

her of things that were upon his conscience. Nannette begged he would let her go for a priest.

“Yes,” he said; “that too, my good angel, thou shalt do; but first I must speak to thee, Nannette.” And then, madame, he told a piteous tale; how, in a foreign land, away from all he loved, to drown the grief which, after he had put the sea between himself and us, seemed to take possession of him, he fell into bad ways. Among companions more wicked than he in his innocent heart dreamed of, he forgot the good lessons he had been taught in the home he had left behind. Happily, he never lost his sense of guilt, only the devil prevailed enough to overwhelm him so completely with shame, that he despaired of forgiveness, and plunged more recklessly into sin. The poor woman he afterwards married was but little better than the

others by whom he was surrounded ; and, though both he and she were making wages enough to have been looked upon at Vire as a fortune, they were often in want of food and clothes. He received the letters which we sent to him by the *Angelique*, and the love they contained seemed, he said, to poison his whole future. Even in his wildest mirth those words sounded in his ears like a funeral bell, and their memory was often his first awakening to consciousness.

At last his health gave way, and then life seemed insupportable, though, when a voice within would tell him his life was drawing to a close, he shrank away terrified, and tried hard to stifle the warning. How he longed for home and quiet he could never say, and, more than all else, the desire possessed him to see once more his father and Nannette. The life he had lived since

he left them seemed a hideous dream, and his one hope now was that he might live until he could get back. His wife opposed him at first, but when he told her that his father was rich, and would keep her and the children without work, she consented. Perhaps the poor woman had a presentiment that she should never reach the foreign land; for though her parents had been French settlers, she knew nothing of their country. Of her, however, Raoul spoke but little, and there was so much to say, and so little strength to tell it with, that Nannette did not learn much, except that he had never felt for any other woman the same love he had given to her whom he had forsaken.

“Nannette,” he said, “miserable as I had ever been, ’twas happiness compared to the agony that took possession of me when I first awoke to what I might have been,

and the full knowledge of what I was. The only prayer for years I dared to utter was to beg happiness for you."

"And God heard that prayer, Raoul," said Nannette. "I had your father to love, and you to remember. Ah! think not, my friend, that my life has been one of sorrow;" and, hoping to comfort him, she told him how good Jean Ferouelle was to her, and that her place at the hotel now was as a daughter, not a servant; and in her poor way, madame, she tried to make him see that God, who ordereth all things well, had ordered that in life these two should be apart, but that in death they should be again united. Then, worn by this talk, the poor fellow dropped into a kind of sleep, from which every now and then he would arouse himself enough to say, "Thou forgivest me, Nannette?" and the peaceful smile her answer would bring



made his face look as young as when he was first her own. Ah, madame ! it was hard to give him up, and, weak and sickly as he was, willingly would Nannette have kept him.

About five o'clock the priest came, and before he left he spoke kindly to Nannette, and told her that he would see if anything could be done for the children, whose welfare alone now troubled the sick man. But Nannette eased him of that burden ; and when she went to Raoul again, she told him that he must give his children to her, and she would be a mother to them ; and after that a great peace seemed to come to him, and he began to hope that God would yet grant him the pardon that for long years he had sought with sorrow and despair. 'Twas Nannette's prayer had gained him this, he said ; had it not been for her, his hard heart had never been touched.

Two days after this he died, madame, calling down blessings on her head, and bidding Marie remember that Babette and herself owed everything they had to their bonne Mère Nannette.

Madame could not credit the goodness which everybody showed to me at that time. The little money Raoul had was spent in paying Madame Cagot's bill, and, bad name as the people around gave the woman, she refused to take a single sou for Nannette; but at parting whispered would she pray for her. The seamen, who seemed so bold and rough that Nannette shrank from their free looks and words, made together a sum to carry the poor one to Vire; so you will know that never since has a sailor gone empty from the Hôtel St. Pierre. The good priest went surety for the undertaker's bill, and wrote a few weeks after to say a friend of the

Church had paid it; and so, with such help, Nannette was able to lay Raoul among his people. Jeanne Ferouelle scolded a little about the children, but in the midst she broke down, saying their food would never be missed, and they should not be parted from Nannette.

The time had passed for grief to strike sharply into Marcel's heart, and he was greatly comforted, poor old man, by the grand funeral Monsieur le Curé gave his son, about which he talked with pride until his death.

After a few years Jeanne Ferouelle also died, leaving all she had to her cousin Nannette, who thus became mistress of the Hôtel St. Pierre. My daughter, Marie Vanier, is already married to Louis Renouf, the farmer at Jurque. Babette, madame, has seen—— Ah, yes, 'tis true she is a dear child; but I cannot expect to keep her

long, for oftentimes, when, the day's work done, I sit thinking on those gone before me, I hear a sound, and, standing outside the forge, I see Fernand, the young blacksmith, while from the window above, I know, leans out Babette, and a mist rises, and the years vanish, and for a short moment it is Raoul who stands there, and Nannette who leans at the window. Then with a smile I rise and bend my steps to a loved spot, which, for its flowers, the children call the garden of "La Bonne Mère Nannette."

END OF VOL. I.



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